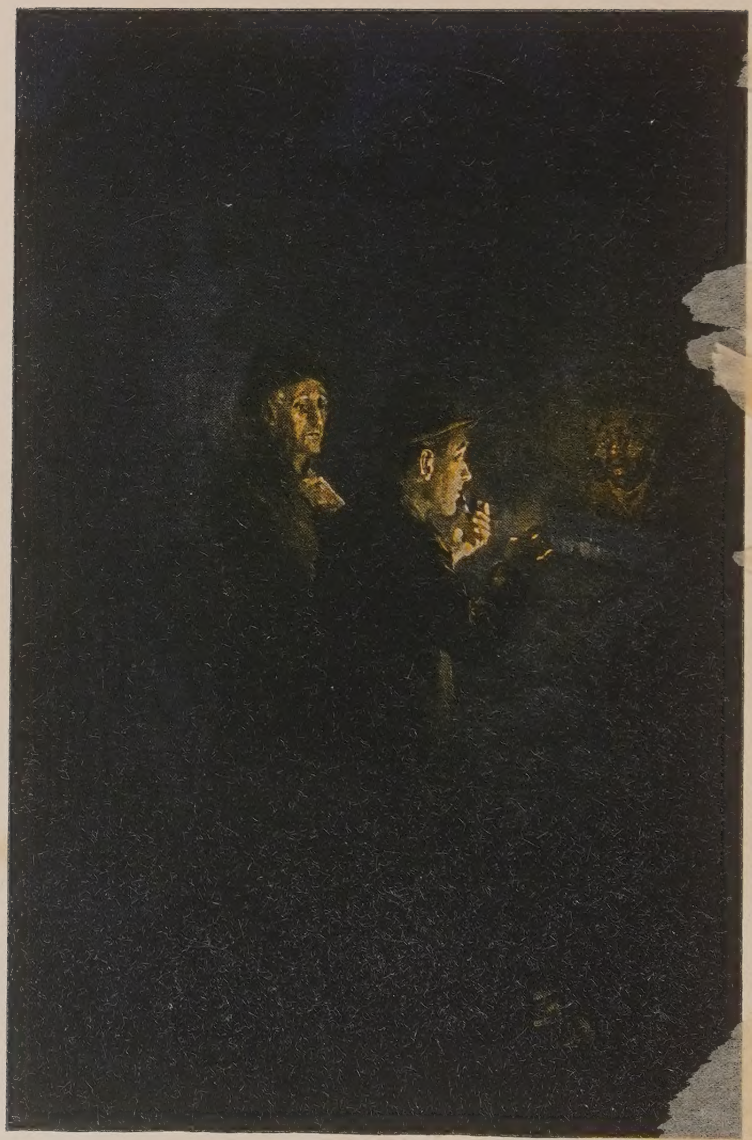
PALS FIRST

FRANCIS PERRY ELLIOTT



See page 25

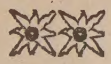
"GOOD LAWSIE MERCY, IF IT AIN'T MISTER DICK!"

PALS FIRST

A Romance of Love and Comradery

BY

FRANCIS PERRY ELLIOTT



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E-P

TO

MY MOTHER

OF BLESSED MEMORY

AT REST UNDER THE BLUE GRASS

OF HER NATIVE TENNESSEE

1820-1910

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PALS FIRST

PALS FIRST

I

THE CROOKED ROAD

SO we came again to a turn of the road.

Now, when I looked up that long, rocky incline, the heart within me plunked like lead.

At my cry of dismay Danny turned.

"Buck up, Dominie," he called back, carelessly, and twirled his knotted road stick; "it's the last hill—the very last hill you'll have to climb!"

Often I've thought of the picture of him as he said it, standing there grinning back at me as I hung spent and worn upon my heavy stick, actually wondering if my old limbs could ever summon strength to take me up the long slope that climbed away behind him.

"Oh, come on!" urged Danny, scornfully. "What's just one more little spurt!"

What indeed, when one is young and the blood flows through the veins like wine! And Danny was all of that—scarcely twenty-seven, dark-eyed, and with a certain devil-may-care quality of good looks

that squared with an air of unabashed impudence that fit him like a glove. Here, too, was no shrinking sensitiveness for the reproach of clothes, as was the case with me. On the contrary, his lithe young shoulders squared themselves within his threadbare coat with the easy nonchalance of the millionaire who dons an outworn suit for freer intimacy with wood and stream. And the jaunty cant of his dusty, weathered old alpine was but the last touch proclaiming the assurance of one who looks out upon the world with eye serene, is smiling and unafraid.

But now, as he studied me, his face went suddenly sober, and with an exclamation he came running back.

"Why, old man," he exclaimed, and his tone was remorseful, "you're nearly all in! I didn't know —I didn't think."

"Let's rest awhile," I panted, and moved to a big stone beside the road. His arm swept itself about my shoulders as he helped me to it.

I shivered a little, gathering more closely my worn old dusty jacket. For the sun was gone and the autumn chill was in the air. About us was settling the quick, Southern twilight, painting the landscape a misty, gray vignette.

Danny looked off up the shining road.

"Now who would think," he said, cheerfully, "that just over that hill-top are the outskirts of a big town—city they would call it down here?"

"Not I, for one!" I grunted frank skepticism as I hugged one of my aching feet. "I wouldn't think so—and I don't!"

"But the man with the corn load said—"

"I know what he said about 'just over the long hill at the crook of the road,'" I interrupted, "but the road crooks everywhere, and, besides, that was five miles back and before— Oh, well, what's the use of threshing that all over again?—*you* know what I think."

For I was obstinate in the opinion that three miles back we had taken the wrong fork of the road.

"You're off!" said Danny, sullenly, and absently fished for his pipe. But I thought he showed some misgiving, so I rubbed it in.

"You will remember we haven't passed any kind of habitation for nearly an hour," I said; "we've seen nothing but fields and woods and the doggonedest rock-pile of a road a man ever put foot to. Honestly, Danny"—waxing warmer—"I don't believe there's been anybody else over it since they had their war down here—I don't, really! If there *is* a town just over that hill," I finished, "it must be lonesome."

Danny grinned. "It won't be when we get there," he said, as he tamped his pipe; "and that will be within an hour now." He smiled indulgently. "Now don't you worry, Dominie, you'll find that I've brought you the right road. If I had a dollar, I'd bet on it." And he cocked his head obstinately.

"And I"—I spoke almost fiercely—"I'd stake the rest of my life that I'll find you haven't."

And, groaningly, I changed attention to the other foot.

"Not that the rest of my life is worth much—or

anything," I muttered, for he was looking at me oddly, pipe wedged in mouth, his fingers groping through his pockets for a match. "Is that what you're thinking—eh?" I spoke bitterly.

"Not exactly!" He removed the pipe and his teeth flashed in a smile. "I say, Dominie, I know I've asked you before, but *won't* you go through yourself just once again and see if you can't find a match somewhere. Do" — coaxingly — "there's a good chap!"

I grunted, but, to please him, I went through my pockets again and even convincingly turned them inside out.

"No match, you see, and nothing else." I went on, gloomily: "Danny, do you suppose we'll ever see any money again?" Then, as he grinned: "No, I'm not joking. Do you suppose we ever shall?"

For answer, Danny leered at me and dug into his pocket.

"What do you call *that?*" With an air he spread his palm before me. "Why, Dominie, see here—why, we've got a quarter, a dime, and—yes, here are three coppers!" An instant he flashed them triumphantly, then tossed and caught them, their jingle chiming with his care-free laugh. "Money!" contemptuously. "Say, what's eating you?"

I indulged him a wan smile.

"And the quarter 'phony,'" I reminded.

Danny's face fell. He looked at the coin with comic ruefulness.

"By George!" he muttered, "it just looks like I

can't work off that quarter!" He turned it between his fingers, then bit it with a wry face. "It's a tinker's job, anyway," he said, disgustedly, and with a flip of his wrist sent it far into the copse beyond the crumbling "grape-vine" fence behind me. This done, he dropped to the leaves at my feet, looking up cheerfully and hugging one ragged knee.

"Never you mind, Dominie, you just let me get where there's people again and we'll have money—oodles of it!—that's not worrying *me* any! You know just all I need is to strike another good town where there's a crowd—eh, Dominie?"

I nodded, cheered a little. I could scarcely feel otherwise, recalling how Danny had only to walk through a crowd and come back to me with money. Sometimes it would be one thing; sometimes another—usually a crumpled bill whose denomination we would scan at the first opportunity; or again, it might be lighter spoil. Trinkets or jewelry my pal never meddled with. Not infrequently it would be a roll that would yield to his wonderful fingers, and then we would live and travel like lords for a while, Danny magnificently scoffing at my uneasy demurs over his improvidence. And then again for the sheer joy of it we would take to the road once more, meeting strange companions, parting from them with the suddenness of Arabs—sometimes jumping a hundred miles or so.

Happy time! Sunny days under blue skies and argosies of fleecy clouds drifting as lazily and as purposeless as we ourselves.

And then—then had come the morning when

Danny had walked out of the post-office at Indianapolis, his face flushed oddly and in his eyes an excitement I had never seen before.

"News?" I whispered.

He nodded, tearing up a letter into fine bits as we walked. I knew it was from the same one—"a faithful friend," he had told me once—with whom he exchanged letters and telegrams from time to time. I had long ago guessed that it was one of the prison guards at San Quentin.

"We've got to angle south, Dominie," was all he said, but my heart sank, for I knew that the California officials had hit his trail at last.

Four hours later we had crossed the Ohio at Louisville, taking to the highroads once we were in Kentucky; boring thereafter, day by day, deeper and deeper into the quiet peace of Dixie Land. But with the change, Opportunity had fallen away from us, and with each passing day the luck had leaner grown. Nor was this all; for, more and more, the increasing shabbiness of our clothes had marked us as worthy objects of suspicion. Still we had moved along easily and without much weariness, holding to the turnpikes and getting miles and miles of lifts from friendly teamsters who grinningly succumbed to Danny's winning gift of cajolery.

Then this forenoon at a town called Gallatin, twenty miles over the Tennessee border, Danny had found a telegram to the name he asked for. He looked at it a long time, then he beckoned me to a barber-shop. When we came out, the bulk of our capital was gone and so were our beards.

Five minutes later we were on the highway.

"We've got to hit this big town ahead—Nashville—and make a strike," was all the explanation he offered, and I questioned him nothing, knowing he would tell me all in his own way and in his own time; "we've got to get out of these"—impatiently indicating our clothes—"and get on faster."

And now, thinking of these things as I sat there, I fell silent, gathering my collar to my throat as I coughed a little under the rising breeze. I sighed as I thought of the long, long stretch that lay between us and the sunny Gulf Coast.

Danny seemed to divine my thoughts.

"Don't you fear, Dominie," he chirped blithely and with a nodding glance; "we'll get where it's warmer before the cold weather gets our heels—you leave it to me! Just let me make one good touch there"—here he leveled his stick at the hill and all that lay beyond—"and you'll see!"

He switched about, facing me, his legs folding tailor fashion.

"And then we'll roll on to New Orleans in style, and *there* we'll have our fine pickings! You just give me a chance first at one big town—like this Nashville"—again his stick pointed over the hill—"and I'll make a clean-up that 'll put us in on the plush cushions!"

He paused, but I was silent.

"Won't I?" Danny finished, wistfully.

I murmured something and avoided his eye. What I was thinking was of how much he could do for himself if he were not encumbered so with me.

His hand came up and touched my knee. "*I* know," he said, gently. "I know what you're thinking, Dominie." The confidence had died from his voice and it was rueful—even apologetic. He looked down, stabbing his stick into the leaves. "It's in your mind that I can't pull off the trick any more—that I'm getting to be a bungling tinker."

"No, no, lad!" I spoke eagerly and from the heart. "You know I'm thinking nothing of the sort. If it's been hard luck lately, do you think I'm blaming you—you who do all of the work and won't let me lift a finger?"

Danny muttered something.

"What's that?" I said, trying to hear.

"I say you're sick—not yourself," he mumbled.

I laughed harshly. "Say, rather, nerve gone!" I spoke bitterly, with a despondency and self-depreciation too deep to measure. I went on: "Why, I couldn't turn a trick a baby could do! I'd have the bulls right on our necks—and you know it!"

I doubled forward, clasping my knee, glooming before me at the purpling road.

"Nerve!" I ejaculated with fierce contempt. "Why, if I had one atom of it left, do you think there's anything—*anything* could hold me to this cursed thing of life?"

"Dominie!"

I brushed his hand away with a snarl, locking my knee in tighter clasp. For the moment I felt I included Danny in my hatred of all the world.

"Dominie!" softly.

And he just looked at me the way he had—eyes

smiling a little, but gentle as a woman's. I scowled at him.

"Dominie!" steadily.

I looked away sullenly. "Aw, let me alone!" I growled through my teeth. "I don't want your pity—I know what you think of me—and I know what I am—a broken-down old prison-bird—down and out and on the rattler! And if I shuffled off to-night"—I lifted my voice passionately—"there's not a soul in all the world to say 'I care'!"

"Dominie!" reproachfully.

The rising breeze stirred the crisping leaves, lifting them like whispering birds on wings. And then something stirred besides the leaves.

Slowly I brought my hand out of my knee clasp and, without looking at him, laid it on his own.

"There!" said Danny with a deep breath. "You didn't mean it now, did you, old chap? You had just forgotten—for a minute—about *me!*"

But my old lips were working so I couldn't speak. I just looked at him in the gathering dusk and smiled. But I hugged his hand within my withered palm.

Danny laughed gaily, scrambling to one knee and peering roguishly up into my face. "I know what's the matter with you," he said; "we climbed out of bed too soon this morning."

I smiled forlornly. "Bed" had been a wagon in a field.

"And I *think* perhaps we breakfasted too lightly." Danny's brows knit themselves into a judicial frown.

We had. Upon a tramp's hand-out, grudgingly

tendered by a farmer's wife. Moreover, it had been our last meal.

"So, meantime," continued Danny, cheerfully, climbing to his feet, "what's the matter with supper?" He looked significantly off up the road. "Feel equal to it, Dominie—eh?"

"Which," I said, and with a little laugh at last, "supper or the hill?"

"Both," grinned Danny, "for we have to take one to get the other." He locked his arm into mine and we moved into the road together. "I knew," he went on airily, "that when I said supper it would stir your stumps."

I grunted. "I would like to see it."

Danny kicked a stone from before my way. "All we have to do is make this town," he said, confidently; "and to make the town, all we have to do is make this hill." He twirled his stick at it defiantly.

It was painful progress up that rocky way, and it seemed the more wearisome because it wound in a bow-like curve, so that we could not see to where the course was leading. At times the overlapping trees made almost complete darkness, then would come a shining stretch of open.

"I think it must be near the top," said Danny, "because it's getting straighter and— *Now* what's the matter?" he broke off, half impatiently.

For I had halted again and was peering about in the glamorous light that the sky poured into one of the clearings.

"Danny," I said, excitedly, "look there!" And I pointed with my stick.

Danny looked. "Where?" he said. "I don't see anything."

I snorted, for my stick was leveled at a broad streak of grass that blanketed the white-bleached bosom of the highway.

"And there!" I indicated a tall mullen stalk that grew rankly in the middle of the way. "What does that mean to you?"

"Um!" said Danny, and I saw that he was dashed.

I limped to the side of the road, stooping and examining a plaster of clay-like silt that had spread from one of the deep-washed gulleys. I straightened with triumph.

"I'll give you something if you can find a wheel-track there, young man," I said with decision. "Tell *me* about travel over here!" And I grunted scornfully.

Danny stared, fingering his chin.

"Oh, well," he muttered, his eye casting farther along the way. Of a sudden he stiffened and with an exclamation broke into a run, the loose stones with which the way was sown clinking under his flying feet. I stood staring after him, until abruptly he stopped away up in the shadows ahead, and there floated back to me an amazed muttering.

"What is it?" I lifted my tired feet in the effort to follow.

"Dominie," he called back, sharply, "I believe—" He broke off and I heard him swearing to himself.

"What have you found?" I cried, striking a stone in my eagerness and almost falling; and then I

thought I saw. For across the way ahead loomed a dark barrier like trees.

"Another twist in this crazy, crooked road," I groaned. "Will we never reach the end of it?"

"Aye," came back his voice; "on my soul, Dominie, I believe we have." I heard his careless laugh.

"What?" I panted.

"Why, the road ends here, that's all!"

"Ends?—oh, nonsense!" I gasped, but swallowed with sudden panic. "It can't end! A road can't just break off short!" I had to halt a moment, panting for breath. "A road has got to go somewhere!"

"That's just it," he called; "It's got there!"

"Got where?" I rasped sharply, and stumbled on again.

"Here!" said Danny, provokingly; then in response to my angry sputtering: "How in thunder do *I* know where it is? Only"—there came his whimsical chuckle—"wherever it is, Dominie, we have arrived!" He twirled his stick carelessly. "What do you think of it—eh?"

I did not answer—I scarcely heard. For I had come up now and was standing with him before the great double iron gateway that confronted us squarely across the road; a gate padlocked with a chain that, like itself, was black with the biting rust of years. Small was the need of a lock, however, for back and front it was buttressed with an undergrowth of sturdy shrubs and weeds, while at one end a vine, thick as a cable, writhed serpent-like from the ground, fantastically coiling and doubling

about the bars and binding them to the embrace of one of the ghostly stone pillars that seemed to rise, sentinel-like, to dispute our way. But there was little beyond to allure. A noble driveway leading away between lines of lofty cedars was scattered with rotting boughs, its graveled surfacing now softened with untrodden moss that spoke eloquently to me of long absence and abandonment. Here and there athwart the way young upstart firs disported themselves arrogantly where once the gravel had whined beneath imperious carriage-wheels.

But this I knew must have been long ago.

To right and left of us ran long lines of ancient stone fencing, gray with the lichens of threescore years and more—their course lost in the darkling jungle of shrub and bamboo vine. And it was plain that there was no way around, not even so much as a bridle-path.

"Well, now, what do you think of that!" muttered Danny. Then he glanced at me sheepishly. "Well, Dominie?"

"Well?" I answered, dispiritedly.

I hobbled to the gate and touched the iron bars, laying my head against them. There was something comfortingly familiar in the pose, for many was the time I had stood thus at my prison window back in England; heartsick, as now, and weary of hope, while the days drifted into weeks and months, and the months into the ashes of dead, lost years.

Now as I stood there, my pal came silently up and gripped the bars beside me; and I remember wondering—so curious is the mind in straying off

to little things—if he, too, had a passing thought of his prison window at San Quentin and the three years he spent behind it.

He coughed, then spoke gently:

"If it would help you any just to kick me back down the hill, Dominie, why, you sail in." Then, as I was silent: "I know just how you feel, old man! I don't blame you."

"It's all right," I muttered, coldly.

Danny was silent an instant.

"Perhaps, Dominie"—his tone lifted hopefully—"the road goes on from the other side—or maybe"—this quickly, as I snarled—"we might strike some eats here and get a doss in the barn for the night." He raised his head, listening. "But I don't hear anybody—not even a dog."

"And you won't," I growled. "Why, look at the gate, you fool!" I struck the thick manacling vine with my stick.

"Well, anyhow, I see a house," said Danny, a little sullenly, and pointed down the avenue.

I could just make it out, too—a great pile of dark brick, with lofty porticos at the front and side. But I knew that it was a house that had no pulse of life.

I remained grimly silent.

A moment's hopeful straining, and Danny relaxed.

"I guess there's nothing doing there," he sighed.

Nothing indeed. Judging by the mute evidence of the gate and drive, nothing had been doing there for years that might toll to a generation or more. It was clear to me that we had stumbled upon an abandoned home—a relic of the South's proud by-

gone era of feudal ease and splendor. But it would be a ruin now, I knew—just a sullenly dissolving ruin; its roof fire-glutted, no doubt; its rooms long since given over to the tenantry of bats and owls. I had seen many such back in England.

"Some place in its time," said Danny.

He had raised himself upon the gate and was still peering curiously through the cedars, blinking in the fast enwrapping gloom. But as for me, I had no further interest in the place nor in anything else. I stumbled to a bank and sank there, sick at heart and half faint with weariness and hunger. And presently Danny came without a word and dropped beside me; and though I would not look, I knew he was eying me with compunction.

And thus we sat there till the twilight faded and nightfall gathered us into its arms. And still my pal said naught, and still I would not turn his way nor make a sign.

Then presently I began to feel sorry for Danny! I had to; he sat there so close beside me and so quiet. I knew he was miserable—remorseful with a self-blame that was lessened none because I hadn't the heart to reproach him; though Heaven knows I was dismayed and sore enough because of the *cul-de-sac* into which he had led our feet.

But where we know the heart is right, it is hard to make blame timber out of the errors of the head. So presently, when I had got myself in hand, I began to feel more sorry for poor Danny than I was for myself—something not so hard to do when I had only to think of how good he had always been to a

poor old derelict who had no other friend in all the world.

So now I summoned a croak of a laugh and turned toward him in the shadows.

"Danny!" was all I said.

The leaves rustled under his slide toward me.

"Dominie!" he breathed, and he got to one knee, half hovering above me like a mothering bird. "I'm sorry!"

Poor Danny!

An instant's pause—a deep breath—and I hurled a handful of leaves about his head.

"Shut up!" I growled at him. "And hand over that dollar you bet me!"

And then we laughed together and began to feel better.

"We'll wait till the moon's up," I said, "and take it easy back to the main road."

I heard Danny swallow. "Dominie!" he said, and gripped my arm. "My! but you've got sand!"

And, indeed, I rather thought I had, myself!

II

BY THE FLARE OF A MATCH

AND so we waited for the moon.

The afterglow withdrew from out the sky and was gone—the last rear-guard of the fleeing day. The vanguard of the stars moved up from out the east and camped upon the field. And still we lay there in the soft leaves, our bodies relaxing deliciously, our eyes widened to the unplumbed infinity above.

And, lying there, I thought how unawed we were by its profundity of space, how undismayed by its impending immensity. For to the roving guest of field or wayside there comes in time a consciousness of benign intimacy, of maternal hovering, in the nearness of the heavens. For however far afield he wanders by day, each night he finds above his couch the same familiar canopy—the arch of the everlasting firmament; the tenement that at last he comes to look upon as home.

And I was musing upon this when Danny sighed.

"If we only had some clothes!" he said.

I laughed, coming back to earth.

He went on gloomily: "It's all well to laugh, but

I tell you it's perfectly ridiculous!" He lifted upon elbow, facing me. "Here we are, you and I, two educated men—both college-bred, both gentlemen born—"

"Whatever we may have become in addition," I broke in, dryly.

"I know," impatiently; "but the point I make is this: what is the use of all of our education and wits, our social up-bringing and training, if it can't do for us better than this?" He spoke fiercely, passionately. "What's the good of the equipment, eh? Do you get me?"

"The race is not always to the swift," I mumbled, "even when the road is straight."

Danny threshed the leaves with his stick.

"Well, I know one thing," he growled, "it does look like you can't turn anything, straight or crooked, unless you've got the rags!"

"We've got those!" I said, grimly.

"Huh!" grunted my pal, and we fell silent for a spell.

A star flashed and fell, burning itself to ashes.

Danny stirred.

"I wonder, Dominie," he said, "if we don't have another chance somewhere." Then, as I was silent, "I guess we do, but I'd like another one here, wouldn't you?"

I sniffed contemptuously.

"Yes, I would—*not!*" Then I turned, scowling through the darkness. "What's the matter—turning pious?" I sneered.

"No," Danny muttered, thoughtfully; "but some-

times it seems to me I'd like another chance." He sat up, hugging his knee. "I tell you I'd live straight the rest of my life."

I lifted my head sharply, hot with a wave of sudden anger.

"Don't talk like a fool!" I spat at him.

He sighed again—this time with a sharp, quick intake of breath.

"Well," he said, and I could tell he was grinning, "I'd like to live straight—but I'd like to turn just one big trick first so I could do it comfortably."

I fell back with relief.

"Now you're talking!" I said; "I'm with you on that kind of proposition." I went on, flatteringly: "But I don't know about you—you're a natural-born clever crook, Danny lad, and you always will be. It's in your blood and you might as well make up your mind to it. You *joy* in the work—it's the wine of life to you; and if you were to quit you'd die of the very humdrum of existence."

"I know," he said, slowly, "but still if I could pull off some one big thing—something for both of us, Dominie—I think I'd like to quit while the quitting was good."

"*Yes* you would!" I jeered. "What about the two years in 'stir' still due the noble State of California?—you forgetting about that?"

"I'd take my chances," Danny muttered; and silence fell between us again. I could hear him puffing upon his unlighted pipe. Presently he turned toward me.

"But do you know, Dominie," he said, "I some-

times feel about it like you did about the road out there." I could see the silhouette of his leveled pipe. "I mean I feel like I'd taken the wrong turn. For the way we've come is a rocky one, Dominie—uphill, too, and lonely."

"Go on—very pretty rhetoric," I said, unmoved.

"And then, Dominie, at the end of the crooked road—what?" The pointing silhouette shifted toward the gate. "Iron bars—a chain—and stone walls. Beyond that, old chap, rotting decay—ruin!"

I clapped my hands derisively.

"Fine!" I jeered. "A moving mission discourse by Mr. Danny Rowland, reformed penman, dip and cracksman; on leave of absence"—here I coughed —"from dear old San Quentin beside the peaceful sea!" I sat up, my voice lifting louder: "We will now have a word of prayer by Rev. Doctor Blair, late of the Church of England, still later of Portland Prison and—"

"For crimini's sake, shut up, you fool!" hissed Danny. "How do you know what jay might be hearing you?"

"I don't care," I grumbled; "anything but that soft-slush gab!" I dropped back sullenly upon my leaves. "It makes me sore clean to the bone. And you don't mean it—you *know* you don't!" I spoke with bitter challenge and something of vague fear. "Mark you, lad!"—with fierce earnestness—"I love you—you're the only thing in this cursed life I do love; but if you ever get the idea you've seen a light or heard the voice of conscience, or any of that damned rot—you know the patter of the missions!

—then remember that from that point our pathways lie apart. You can go—"

"'Sh-h-h!"

His fingers suddenly, sharply, gripped my knee.

I stiffened rigidly.

It was suddenly still—so still that I could hear the far-off mutter of a train.

"I see a light!" he muttered, tensely.

"Oh!"

And I relaxed disgustedly.

"You young limb!" I growled, for I thought it was his foolery. "You really had me that time. 'See a light!'" I chuckled. "And do you also hear 'the voice of conscience'?"

"No," said Danny, in his same low tone, "but I hear the voice of a dog—and a big one, too, or I miss my guess."

"What's that?" And I shuffled to my knees.

I could hear it, too, now: an intermittent, deep-throated bark, unquestionably proceeding from a large dog. It was somewhere beyond the wall; up near the house, it seemed.

"See, there's the light again!" Danny pointed. "Somebody with a lantern there moving near the old ruin—but *is* it a ruin?" With the question his voice quickened excitedly. "By George, Dominie, we may eat supper yet!"

"Go on," I gasped, huskily; "call to him!"

We were both on our feet now and I was as excited as Danny. The dog's deep baying had quickened and there came a menacing growl.

The lantern seemed drawing nearer.

"That big brute is on to us," said Danny; "and now the fellow with the lantern is listening. Here goes, Dominie!"

"Hello! Hello! *Say* there!" And he had the nerve to blow a long, shrill whistle upon his fingers. "Say, mister!"

A pause, and we heard a muttering, smothered in the resentful and excited roar of the big dog. Then a sharp reprimand silenced him to a protesting growl.

The lantern approached cautiously.

"Who you?"

The tone was doubtful and suspicious. The speaker lifted his lantern, trying to see, and we glimpsed the black face and white hair of an aged negro. It recalled to me pictured representations I had seen of the fast-fading types of old-time Southern house servants.

The lantern stopped.

"What you want, dere?" Then, without waiting for reply, "You tell me who you is and what you want, or I ain't gwine come no closter."

As if sensing the hostility in his master's tone, the dog again lapsed to threatening growls. We could see him pushing in front, bristling and alert.

Danny whispered:

"Here, *you* do the palaver, Dominie. With that saintly silvered hair and cultured English voice of yours you can always put it over. But let's talk to him across the fence—not through the gate, for he'll be hep to our clothes."

Evidently the dog was already "hep" to them.

His nosings through the bars of the gate were exciting him to renewed hostile vocatives that we were aliens and undesirable citizens.

"Go on—throw a spiel!" hissed Danny. "Hurry!"

The old negro was cautiously creeping nearer the fence. We heard him grunt.

"I was just pow'fully convicted I hear somebody out here," he muttered. "Dey must 'a' been just passin'." He addressed the dog. "Shut up, you born fool! Lemme listen!"

We moved toward the wall.

"What's the lay?" I whispered.

"Any old thing! Let me see. Tell him we're gentlemen pedestrians who have lost our way." And his throat chuckled.

"Oh, stuff!" And I halted uncertainly. "You think he won't know tramps when he sees them?"

"He won't see," his whisper snapped; "he'll only hear us. Besides," complacently, "we don't talk like tramps—there's where we win out."

I was not convinced, but I cleared my throat, advancing to the wall.

"Good evening," I said, pleasantly.

There was no response, but with lantern lifted high the old darky moved slowly to meet me, and certainly his face was uncompromising enough. I had had no experience with negroes and felt abashed —irresolute—as to what was my best procedure. The dog, a great mastiff, I could now see it was, raged frantically, leaping high at the fence the while as though he fain would hurl himself across it and morsel me limb by limb.

I made him serve me as an opening.

"Fine dog, that!" I tried, my head just above the last capstone, and I smiled ingratiatingly. "Yours, is he?"

A moment's pause while he studied me with undissembled doubt and suspicion.

"No, he ain't," sullenly; "he belongs to Mister Dick—*shut* up, you Argus!"

The dog subsided his noisy harrying, but betook him to the gate, growling angrily through it at my pal.

"Ah, I see!"—I nodded cheerfully—"the gentleman who lives here?" Then, as the white head chopped assent, I assumed a confidential tone. "Why, I'll tell you: I wonder if you would mind asking him—"

"Mister Dick ain't home!" The information was jerked forth bluntly. "Dey ain't nobody here but me an' Car'line an' Jeff."

"Oh!" and I thought quickly. "Are you expecting him back soon?"

"Mister Dick?" A grunt, as though the question were something particularly absurd. "Mister Dick, he been in Eu'ope 'most a year." Then he added, as if more for his own satisfaction than for mine, "He gone dere fer his health." And he was moving to go.

"See here, my friend," I was beginning, earnestly, when just then my pal's voice cut in eagerly:

"*Don't* forget," he called, sharply, "to ask him for a match!"

With a cry the old negro wheeled, his ejaculation pointed with disaster; for with a tingling crash the

lantern swung hard against the wall and was extinguished.

"Who—who dat?" I could hear him breathing heavily. "Who dat spoke?"

"Just my friend," I said. "He asked you for a match."

In the shadowed starlight I indicated Danny, who had taken advantage of the accident to slip to my side, bringing himself also behind the screening wall.

A pause, and there came a reassured grunt.

"Lawsie!"—through a half-giggle—"if I didn't tink dat was Mister Dick! It sound *zackly* like Mister Dick." His reaching hand found mine across the fence. "Here's all de matches I got, mister—jus' two of 'em."

"Thanks!" And I passed them to my pal. I heard his sigh of satisfaction, and there came a flare of light. The old darky was stooping behind the wall for his broken lantern.

"If I knowed *dat* was all you want," I heard him mumble, "I wish I done brung more." And he straightened stiffly.

Then came a sucking gasp.

"*Good* lawsie mercy, if it ain't Mister Dick!" And the lantern clattered down again. "Mister Dick! *Mister* Dick!"

With pipe limp in mouth and the flaring match poised above it like a tiny star, Danny stood there without drawing the fire, the blank amazement in his face gradually yielding to an expression of whimsical humor.

"Mister Dick!" Gurgling joyously, the old man was struggling to reach up to him from the lower ground of the other side. "Whar you been all dese months—huh?" His big white eyeballs, shot with saffron veins, were distended wide. "Lawsie, honey, don't you know some of 'em's sayin' you's dead? But ol' Alex *tol'* 'em you wa'n't!" It was a tremulous shout of triumph. "I *knowed* you was all right! I jus' tol' Car'line dis mornin' I bet you comin' soon, 'cause my nose 'uz itchin' so."

On the instant the match stung Danny's fingers and he dropped it. He was in darkness again, and with his pipe still unlighted.

Moreover, the old darky had got one of his hands. I could see him patting and stroking it, and in the glamorous starlight it seemed to me he drew it to him and laid his face thereon.

"Honey! honey!" I heard him sigh. "You did come back to ol' Alex, didn't you?"

And in the darkness there was a sob.

III

"WELCOME HOME, MISTER DICK!"

DANNY struck his other match.

"I guess," and my pal's voice was pleasant, even regretful, "you're taking me for some one else."

He puffed this time with diligence, his eye upon his pipe, taking no further chances with his smoke. Then, with the flame spitting bravely, he raised it smilingly before his face, craning his neck above the wall and turning his head right and left so the other could fully see.

The old negro peered closer, then relaxed with a grunt. A low laugh crossed the fence to us.

"G'wan, Mister Dick!" His reproachful growl terminated in a comfortable chuckle. "Quit yo' tryin' to projeck wid de ol' nigger!"

In all of our devious vagabondage together I had seldom seen Danny taken aback. But now in the face he turned toward me I could trace an odd abashment struggling through a blank amaze. His mouth corner twisted at me a comical, questioning appeal.

But I made no sign, for I was thinking hard.

Suddenly the match between his fingers flared to bonfire brightness, then faded to a writhing worm

of fire. The black-gray starlight cloaked us once again.

Out of the gloom lifted the old negro's voice, passionate with praise and thanksgiving.

"Praise de Lord, oh, my soul! Thank Him fer all His mercies!" he quavered, fervently. "And welcome home, Mister Dick! welcome home ag'in!"

Danny stirred uneasily and coughed, and I knew that my young pal, soft-hearted as a girl in some ways, had found here an element that touched him and embarrassed.

Not so with me!—I had no such weakness! I was too wise—had lived too long in the world, had been tricked by it too often and had suffered from it too much to be moved for a moment by any silly sentimentality. Least of all in a time like this when I was tired, half sick, and desperate unto death. In the situation I read opportunity—opportunity that it would be madness to disregard. Somewhere beyond those trees were shelter, warmth, and food—clothes, too, perhaps, and a good night's rest. All these things were there, and nobody in charge, it seemed, but this doddering, hysterical old negro caretaker.

I glided to Danny's side and fiercely, significantly pressed his arm.

He stiffened, jerking his head about.

I said nothing. But in the darkness I tried to lock eyes with him, gripping my fingers tighter, my teeth hissing warning that only he could hear. And of a sudden he relaxed understandingly and his pipe's red eye seemed to wink at me.

"I'm on!" he muttered.

"Then play up!" I growled.

Forthwith I vented a sudden loud horse-laugh. I banged him on the back.

"No use keeping it up, Dick!" My exclamation proclaimed genial, boisterous surrender. "What's the use? You can't fool him! he *knows* you!" And again I pounded, my voice lifting in cackle of high glee.

The old darky gurgled happily.

"Huh!" he grunted. "I knowed him all de time; he never fool me for a minute—not a *minute!* Like to see anybody fool ol' Alex about anything like that! Shucks!"—grunting—"I knowed your voice soon's you spoke, Mister Dick; but this other gent'man comin' between and askin' me fer a match kinder got me flustered fer a minute, and—did you see me drop de lantern?" Then, in a reproachful wail: "La, Mister Dick, *whar* you been you not write to nobody fer so long? Don't you know you been gone 'most a year?"

Danny mumbled something—I don't remember what. I could feel him boring at me—questioning me for his cue.

A year! I snapped at the information as a trout does a fly. Here was an accounting, ready at hand, for any shortcomings in resemblance that closer inspection might reveal. Inspection!—ah, there was the rub! If we might only get to decent raiment before the old fool could see us!

"Say something—quick!" I mumbled behind my lip. I had done my part and was growing limp with the strain of it all. "Go on!—and don't forget his

name's Alex." Then, with afterthought from my reading: "Call him '*Uncle* Alex.'"

Danny cleared his throat.

"How are you, Uncle Alex?" He chirped it heartily enough.

The other chuckled.

"La, Mister Dick, dis ol' nigger mighty po'ly, *mighty* po'ly! Seems some days like I can't get about 't all on account de mis'ry in my back. I try to walk down de pike de other day an' I—"

The theme halted. Then, with abrupt transition:

"Say, how you-all come from de station?—you didn't walk, did you? What? Lawsie mercy, what you want to do dat fer?" Obviously he was shocked, even aggrieved. "Why'n't you tel'phone from town? Jeff could 'a' hitched up in a minute an'— *How* dat?"

"I said we wanted to surprise you," repeated Danny, and I detected with relief the old whimsical note. For I knew that his assurance, once summoned, would command the situation.

"Uh-*huh!*" Uncle Alex gurgled; "dat why you come a-slippin' 'roun' by de ol' branch road, 'stead o' comin' up de pike 'roun' by de front, huh?" He choked gleefully. Then, with a note of consternation, "My lan', Mister Dick, you didn't tote yo' bags all dat way, did you?"

"Bags?" For a moment Danny seemed likely to balk. Then he rallied. "Oh no, we left them—er—at the station." I heard him choke.

"In town," I put in quickly.

"Yes, in town," said Danny. Then, unblushingly, "We checked them in the parcel-room."

"La, honey, 'spose somebody steal 'em!" His shocked murmur was all but a groan. "Neber min', I send Jeff right in on de int'urb'n an'—"

"No! no!" said Danny, hastily, "you mustn't do that!" And I made haste to chime with my own protest. "He can bring them out—er—to-morrow. Eh, Doctor?"

"Oh yes!" I agreed, with grave finality.

"With our trunks!" The rascal's foot batted my ankle.

Trunks!—trunks, indeed!

"Uh-*huh-h!*" It was a mild explosion of wonder and anticipation. "I bet you done brung back mo' fin' things from all dem gran' places! Uh!" he grunted, "won't hardly wear yo' ol' things now no mo', I reckon! Have to give 'em to me an' Jeff." He chuckled. "An' Car'line she send all yo' winter clothes in town to be pressed. She *jus'* got 'em back—Thursday, I think it was—no, it was Friday. Ain't dat funny? But la, honey"—with sudden shift—"ain't you-all *awful* hongry?"

"Starved!"

The ring of absolute truth and sincerity was in the word as it burst from Danny.

"*Good* land o' mercy!"

It was a gasp of consternation, dying to a murmur. His shadowed outline dipped from view and we heard the chime of glass as again he found and gathered up the frame of the broken lantern.

"Standin' here a-gassin' an' forgettin' all about dat!—Car'line she kill me! I got to go tell her right dis minute."

"No, no!" spoke Danny, with panic in his voice. "Don't tell anybody till we have a chance—hm!—a chance—" He swallowed, growling to me an appeal.

"A chance to wash and brush up a little," I filled in, smoothly.

"That's it, to wash and brush up a little first," repeated Danny, glibly. "You see, Uncle Alex, we're so—er—dusty."

"But, Mister Dick," appealingly, "I *got* to tell Car'line; you know you-all got to have some supper!"

"Oh, sure!" "Certainly!" We chorused it involuntarily.

"*I* tell you what!" said Uncle Alex in impressive whisper, "I go start de fire in yo' room, Mister Dick—it kep' al'ays set fer you—an' put a light in de hall so's you-all won't go an' break yo' necks. Den you slip up an' git in yo' room; an' when you is, I go tell Car'line."

"Fine!" enthused Danny. "Eh, Doctor?" And I crooned echo.

Uncle Alex indulged in a throaty laugh.

"I got to tell her you-all dressin'," he said; "fer I reckon dat's about all 'd keep her out."

"*Do* say that," said Danny, hastily; "for I'll tell you what's the fact, Uncle Alex"—his voice slowed and dropped with the impressive deliberation of one about to impart a frank confidence—"I expect we *will* have to dress really—have to change throughout. Doctor Blair here"—facing me—"will have to let me lend him some of my things till his trunks

come." And I could plainly see the flash of the rascal's teeth. "You *must*, Doctor."

"Oh no, my boy," I murmured, perfunctorily. And then methought I would give the young wag a Roland for his Oliver. "No," I said, firmly; "no, I will just wear what I have, Dick."

"Eh?" It was an involuntary gasp.

"Oh yes," I said in as matter-of-course tone as I could assume; "it's hardly worth while changing—robbing you—"

"'Tain't no robbin'," Uncle Alex put in; "he got a closet up dere hangin' jus' plum full o' clothes."

I thought Danny groaned.

"An' chists o' drawers jus' bulgin'."

I heard Danny swallow heavily.

"Yes, indeed, Doctor," he chirped; "you must let me have my way this time. For my! I had no idea it would be so dusty walking over—did you?"

"No, indeed, my boy—nor so far," I cooed, unctuously. "Otherwise, with my years, I'm afraid I should never have undertaken it." And I cleared my throat with dignified affectation. "I thought from what you said, my dear Dick, that it was only a short walk from the station to your home—"

"Dat's if you come de main pike," Uncle Alex volunteered.

"Ah!" said Danny, in a tone of chagrin, "that's what I was thinking of! My! my! it's perfectly astonishing how you'll forget things you've known all your life—I mean after you've been away from home a few months."

"True, indeed!" I sighed, ponderously.

"But de station ain't been put dere more'n six months, Mister Dick. Jus' since de Gallatin int'urb'n come along by here."

"*That's* a fact!" chirruped Danny, in no wise put out. "But now, let me see—who *was* it wrote me about that new station?"

"Mis' Jean, I bet—anybody might know." A snicker floated to me. "But lawsie, honey, *dis* ain't gettin' you no supper." And he began to shuffle away—and to my great relief; for a soft, dawn-like glow, heralding the rising moon, was beginning to feather the cedar-tops.

"Heah, Argus!" he called. Then he whistled. "Now, whar dat dog go?"—mutteringly—"I 'speck he must 'a' smelled a rabbit." He looked back again. "All right, Mister Dick," he whispered, loudly; "you come when you sees me open de front door." Then he chortled. "I don't reckon you've forgot whar yo' room is—huh? Reckon you can find it?"

"Oh yes!" But my pal's tone lacked confidence. Then he seemed to have inspiration. "Just leave my door open," he called, "so Doctor Blair can see."

The problem was narrowing, but I scented still a danger.

"If we could only keep *him* out of the way till we get in," I whispered Danny. "Can't you think of some way?"

"I'll fix it!" And his voice lifted again. "Oh, Uncle Alex," he called; "hold on—come back just a minute, will you? I want to tell you something." He moved a few feet from me down the wall and I

heard his choke of laughter. Full well I knew by it that some madcap humor was pricking him. I waited uneasily.

"Yes, suh." Uncle Alex drew back to the fence, expectant and receptive.

"I'll tell you," said Danny, in a whisper carefully audible for my ear; "my friend here, Doctor Blair, is a stranger, and I think he'll probably like it better if even *you* keep out of the way—just till he gets brushed up a little—you *do* that, will you?"

"Cert'ny! cert'ny, Mister Dick—*I* will."

"*You* understand!" hissed Danny; "he's a kind of old woman about his looks—*you* know how all preachers are."

"Preacher!" There was a gasp. "Am he a *preacher?* For la-a-nd sakes! La, I got to go right away. Car'line 'll want me to kill a chicken! Preacher! Well, if dat don't—"

And this time Danny let him go.

With his going, Danny executed a hornpipe in the middle of the road.

Then he embraced me tragically.

"Dominie! *Dominie!*" he exclaimed. "Will you kindly pinch me so I may see if I'm awake?" And he dropped his dead weight upon me so that we all but fell together.

"Talk about luck falling out of the sky!" he crowed; and I was scarcely less excited. "Say, what *do* you think of it, Dominie?"

"I don't know, Danny—except, of course, that the old negro must be crazy."

"Oh, sure!—regular bugs!" He puffed, nursing

the fire of his pipe. "But what do we care?" complacently.

"Nothing—only"—I spoke uneasily—"I'm thinking about this other one—this Caroline. Maybe she—"

"I know," said Danny, soberly; "I was thinking of that." He reflected. "But look here, Dominie, we'll have the rags before she sees us—savvy? We've got that framed all safe—"

"But supper—" I began.

"Hang supper!" impatiently. "What's supper to the clothes? I tell you I'm for a quick get-away as soon as we make the shift. Dominie"—impressively—"we'll never have such a chance again!"

I sighed.

"Poor Dominie!" Danny laughed, bringing his pipe back to a ruddy glow. "It's that supper—all he's thinking about!" He studied a moment. "Now, look here, old man, we'll get something in town, I tell you—"

"Town!"—savagely. "On a dime and three—"

"Easy! easy!" soothed Danny. "You forget I'm counting on other pickings besides clothes—money, perhaps; who knows?"

"There are also telephones," I demurred, uneasily. "Nice thing if we were lagged as soon as we got to town."

"Bah!" scoffed Danny, recklessly. Then, with confident tone: "Now there's not the slightest danger of that—not for anything we do *here!* Do you think it likely these two old negroes will be fly enough to do anything of that sort—I mean even if they got

wise to us? Not in one thousand years! Why, they would have to go consult neighbors—friends of the family; and these would have to get their heads together and agree on something; and by the time they got busy where would we be?" He snapped his fingers scornfully. "And anyhow, we don't see anybody to-night but this old man, and there *can't* be any danger for us until to-morrow—I doubt if any for a day or two. Don't you see that?"

It looked reasonable then, as he put it. Anyhow, I was reassured.

"If we could only have something to eat first," I murmured, dispiritedly. "Danny, you don't think we could—we *would* dare—" I hesitated.

"Face Caroline?" He was silent a moment while he stooped, knocking out his pipe against his heel, his head turned toward the house. "Dominie, old man"—gently—"I'm afraid."

A deep breath I drew, but said no more.

Yet he still stood there, his pipe poised in hand, his head turned thoughtfully toward the gate. It was getting light enough now for me to see his face dimly, and I could make out that it was contracted in a troubled frown.

I listened, thinking he must have heard something.

"Dominie," he said, shortly, "do you suppose—" He broke off.

"What?"—uneasily.

He laughed. "Oh, but pshaw!—what nonsense!" He faced me, blowing through his pipe. "Why, I was just wondering about this duck—this 'Mister Dick' who's wandering around somewhere in Europe.

Do you suppose—well, that I *could* look so much like him?" Then, without awaiting my reply, he laughed again—I thought a little nervously. "But of course not!" He turned again toward the gate, threshing the end of his stick at the road. Then he shifted it, flexing it behind his shoulders. "It can't be anything but this crazy coon's bug!" he muttered. But his tone was half questioning, irresolute, sheepishly wistful.

I had been thinking.

"I don't know," I said, slowly; "these strange resemblances—doubles, even—do come up every once in a while."

Danny wheeled, laughing scorn.

"You believe that? Oh yes, I *know*—in plays and books they do—the two Dromios of Syracuse; the Corsican Brothers; the two redheads in *The Prisoner of Zenda*; and not forgetting Sydney Carton and Evremonde in *A Tale of Two Cities*. I know, Dominie, but I mean in real life. In real life there are none."

"More!" I pronounced with conviction. "There is hardly a person living but what somewhere, at some time in his life, has met with such a case." I went on earnestly: "I was just thinking of two instances I know of myself—one in my own home in Dorsetshire. No, not twins," answering his interruption, "these men were in no way related; but they were perfect doubles in voice and every feature." I smiled, retrospectively. "They used to have a lot of fun through it. Then," I went on, checking another interruption, "you can't ignore history;

and it is full, world without end, of such things; if we had time I could think of a dozen cases for you. Then again, perfect duplication is a thing not uncommon among animals of the same species. Take horses and dogs; for instance, those of widely different pedigrees. Accidents, you say; but why should man be an exception to these accidents?"

Danny studied me curiously.

"Look here," he said, abruptly, "I half believe you're getting a bug about this resemblance yourself." Then he laughed. "And so am I!"

He moved to the iron gate, peering within as the brightening light revealed the perspective of the drive.

"By George, Dominie, if it *should* be true!" he breathed; and the idea seemed suddenly to startle, to dismay. "Great Scott, what we would be passing up!" He groaned.

And then I spoke up boldly, for hunger makes even the timid desperate.

"Don't pass it up," I said, a little hoarsely. "Let's go to it!"

He whirled about.

"You mean, risk Caroline?"

"I'll risk anything for supper," I sighed. "After all, they can't kill us."

In an instant my pal was by me.

"Dominie!"—gripping my hand—"you're a brick! *Shall* we? And you're not afraid?"

I grunted denial. And I guessed suddenly that it was me he had been thinking of.

"I'd face jail for supper, Danny!"

He laughed. "So would I, Dominie; the stomach is king! I'm beginning to understand now how a man can eat a hearty supper the night before he's hung. That always used to puzzle me!"

We stood a moment in low colloquy, going over the situation, planning and rehearsing our rôles in the little drama that had been thrust upon us.

"It's just like the home-coming of Ulysses," said Danny as we climbed the fence; "the return all unannounced and disguised in beggar's rags. Did you get that, Dominie?—disguised!" He coughed.

"Aye," I said, bitterly enough; and I quoted from memory, 'In squalid vests with many a gaping rent'!"

Danny flourished his road-stick.

"And even with staff in hand!" And he rattled on: "And then the recognition by faithful old servant. By ginny, it's all there, Dominie—there was even the meeting with the dog!"—excitedly. "That's what made me think of it; for did you notice what he called him? It was 'Argus.'"

"I wouldn't say much about the dog," I commented, dryly.

"Why not the dog?"

"Because," I reminded, "you remember Ulysses's dog recognized his master in spite of his disguise."

"Um!" grunted Danny.

"And 'Mister Dick's' dog didn't know you from Adam! He made it plain enough—if the fool negro hadn't been so blind—that he never saw you before in his life."

"Well, he's got nothing on me," said Danny, lightly; "I never saw *him* before!"

A spray of moonlight played upon the trees above our heads, spattering us with its rays. It was a hint to move on, but I lingered still a moment.

"Now, there would be some coincidence, though, if—" I looked at Danny, slyly.

"If what?" curiously.

"If *she* should be there."

"She?" My young pal looked startled. "What she?"

"Penelope," I said, gravely; "Penelope, the faithful, awaiting her lord's return!"

IV

"DANNY'S ANCESTRAL HALLS"

THE tall cedars were frosted with moonshine now, and the park-like demesne seemed netted under a fairy web of gossamer.

Moving cautiously, and without a word between us now, we made our way nearer and nearer the house, circuiting the exposed tangle of walks and parterres and hugging the friendly umbrage of some great oaks. Here and there were open places, but we darted arrow-like across these, holding from shrub to shrub and harkening for challenge from man or dog. For well we knew that to be seen in that revealing light meant disaster, summary and final.

Once, when in lead, I dropped prone upon the shells of a curving walk and lay panting like a frightened rabbit, behind a great billowy mound of honeysuckle. The soft peal of laughter that had sounded from out the grove to my right spelled mockery and derision.

Danny's hand touched my shoulder.

"It's nothing," he whispered; "it came with the rising breeze, and from somewhere beyond the

house; from where the negro farm-hands are quartered, probably; I've read of such places. There! Listen—don't you hear?"

Far away a voice was rising in song, etching into the peace of the night. A pause, and again came a waft of laughter through the trees, one boisterous haw-haw dominating the rest. With it this time came plainly the cheerful twang of a banjo strumming an interlude. Then the voice lifted again. But now its theme had changed—this time it was slow and plaintive:

> Dark night am comin', childen,
> An' I'm fur frum my cabin door.
> I'm a-lookin' an' a-peerin',
> But my heart am sick wid fearin';
> An' I can't trabel on no more!

Perhaps it was because I was so tired, but of a sudden a sense of my age and desolation seemed to fall upon me, shivering me like an icy mantle. The random words had found fair mark—touching me with a chill of despair.

"Safe enough from them," said Danny, in my ear. "Come on!"

We slipped onward, but with unrelaxed caution, pausing at length under the protection of our last outpost—the low-spreading foliage of a big magnolia.

Before us loomed the square outline of the house, suddenly expanded, it seemed, as if by some necromancy, into proportions gigantic and awe-inspiring. The great porch with its massive columns stretched right and left, the capitals and flutings

chiseled by the moonlight to marble whiteness. They towered far above us; silent, colossal sentries that seemed to question our intrusion.

In the center was the outline of a high, wide door-frame, the entrance, I took it, of a hall beyond. But the great white door itself stood closed in our faces; the long, big knocker in the middle lying splotched against its whiteness like some black official seal with which it had been closed for ever.

Under the spell of it all I felt a sudden misgiving —a qualm of fear. Contributing to this was the black gloom of the great windows whose panes stared at us—a hundred unwinking eyes; questioning, but unafraid.

"Our friend," muttered Danny, "hasn't set the stage yet!"

"I wonder where he is," I whispered, uneasily.

Danny shook his head.

A cloud touched the moon and it grew dark. Above us the thick magnolia leaves whispered, haunted by a sudden breeze. Then they lapsed to abrupt silence and I could hear the wind passing on, mourning plaintively through the cedars, dying far away in the direction from which we had come.

Now, of a sudden, what with the austere silence of the house and the lingering impression of the song, I sickened of the emprise.

"Danny," I whispered; "come—let's go!" I tugged at his sleeve.

"Go?" He whirled half round, a sharp-cut silhouette against the gray-white driveway that ran before the house. "Go where?"

"Away from here"—I swallowed nervously—"anywhere!"

"You're crazy!"—with hoarse emphasis of disgust. "What are you getting cold feet about?"

I hesitated, shifting uneasily.

"I don't know"—gloomily; "but I've a feeling we'll be kicked out like tramps—the imposture is too transparent. We'll be expelled with contempt, Danny, and—" I faltered, my glance sweeping again the curving drive, the noble trees, the splendid old-time mansion in the foreground. Before my mind swam the vision of an old manor-house back in England—one that I had known and loved in the far, dim long ago. "And I tell you, Danny, I couldn't bear it—not *here!*"

He clutched me sharply, hissing warning reminder. Then he laughed.

"Say, old man, what 's come over you?" he grumbled. "This isn't like you at all. You've generally got stomach for more hazards than we dare undertake. Look here"—in a whisper—"speaking of stomachs, just fix your mind on that good supper we're going to try for. *That's* the kind of thinking you want to do!"

I was silent, and he patted my shoulder kindly.

"Just tired out, old chap, aren't you?—and not yourself. Things don't look right when we're that way, do they? Let's think of *success!* Didn't we agree to take a gamble on this resemblance business?—didn't we, now?" Then, as I murmured assent: "Well, then, cut out the cold feet till we come a cropper. I tell you, Dominie"—with a note of ex-

citement—"the more I think of it and the way that old negro went on, the more I think there's something in it. Why, he *saw* me, Dominie—saw me good and square; don't you remember? And I tell you I believe we're going to get away with it—I really do! And anyhow"—his tone hardened—"the thing's just come to this with us—we *must* get away with it! It's our last chance, Dominie; the last thing in our bag of tricks!" He said it slowly, then paused for it to sink in. And it did!

He went on, tapping my knee impressively as he made each point:

"Food, Dominie, for the price of an hour's play-acting; and clothes again—the clothes of gentlemen. Clothes," he breathed to my ear; "clothes, and who shall say what else, before morning!"

I started, looking at him.

"Don't you see?" he went on, as though I had spoken. "If we get past the woman, too, we will have the run of the house—and the night before us!"

"Danny!" My pulses tingled—quickening again with the thrill of life. "Danny, you're a—"

"'Sh-h-h!" he whispered.

He nudged me, pointing upward.

"Look!"

In the two windows to the right was flickering an orange gleam of light. Now, as we looked, it brightened to a steadier glow. A figure came to the windows in turn, reached out, and we heard the low, muffled bang of closing shutters.

"Our fellow-conspirator," breathed Danny, "takes no chances."

I nodded, my eyes glued to the great doorway buried in the shadowed porch. Presently its high fanlight quivered into life and with it the tall, narrow frames that flanked each side. A cautious movement of bolts became audible; then came the startled, protesting screech of a lock that obviously was seldom if ever disturbed. There was a jerk, a querulous whine of hinge, and the doorway became suddenly a square of mellow warmth. The glow struck hospitably across the porch without, spattering the flutings of the great pillars, seeming to stretch long, welcoming arms to the two poor wayfarers crouching out there beside the black trunk of the old magnolia.

We could see plainly now down the perspective of a long hall, terminating in a wide stairway whose polished hand-rail curved away into the darkness above. Our white-haired old negro friend was shuffling about, dusting here and there with a feather implement. We could even hear him chuckling to himself.

Presently, he came to the threshold, a tall brass candlestick lifted above his head.

"It all right now, Mister Dick," he projected, in cautious tone. "You-all kin come soon's you a-mind to." He stood listening, waiting. "Is you dere, Mister Dick?" he breathed, tensely, anxiously.

Danny touched me, and we slid back farther under the densely shadowing magnolia. A twig snapped under my heel.

"Mister Dick!"

He shuffled nearer, standing at edge of the porch beside one of the great columns, turning his head

anxiously right and left and holding the candlestick high. I felt a qualm of alarm lest he explore farther with it in hand. I pressed Danny's arm, hissing warning.

My pal cleared his throat softly.

"All right, Uncle Alex," he said, in a quiet, low tone.

The old man started, his face clearing instantly.

"Is you dere?" he whispered, hoarsely. "La, honey, I was gettin' scared about you. I thought maybe you'd hurt yo'self gettin' ober dat fence—I orter brung a ladder—I plum forgot about yo' not bein' strong. Ain't dat jus' like ol' Alex?"

He gurgled happily, and for an instant it seemed like he was going to step down and come to us. I shrank, apprehensively.

"We're all right, Uncle Alex," said Danny, hastily. "You can go ahead now."

His nerve emboldened me. "Tell him," I muttered, "not to forget what you told him."

"And, Uncle Alex!" hissed Danny.

"Yes, suh." He leaned blinkingly toward the magnolia.

"You remember what I told you?" My pal's tone was low and measured. Then, as the old man cocked his head on one side, "You know—about keeping out of the way."

There was sudden vigorous nodding and a grin. "Yes, suh! *Yes*, suh! *I* ain't forgettin'." And he turned away.

Half-way to the door his shuffle halted. He turned back with a quick glide.

"What done kep' me so long was Car'line," he imparted in a low tone. "She was plum cur'is to know who I was talkin' to so long down at de ol' gate. I had to make up sump'n quick. I tol' her"—his free hand covered a chuckle—"it was jus' a couple of low-down tramps tryin' to beg sump'n to eat."

And, snickering, he moved within, placing the candlestick upon something to the left. Then his white head moved definitely down the long hall and was swallowed from our view.

We heard a door close.

"Now!" said Danny, crisply.

I would never have deemed possible—at least for me—the swiftness of the strides that brought us to the porch and across to the lighted door.

But here I hesitated.

For behind us the darkness trooped at our heels, seeming to my nervous fancy a silent ward and watch closing in between us and all escape. Moreover, with the glance within, my memory had quickened again and with a poignant pang. For the hall, with its height and space, the tall doorways at the sides, the high carven chair-backs against the wall and the other old-timey furniture so perfectly preserved—all took me back to the days when I was a lad—to what had once been home. Why, even the old hair-cloth sofa against the wall looked the very mate of that in my father's study upon which I had lolled through many a vacation hour, my day-dreams active with boyhood's busy concerns—the long, long thoughts of youth and care-free days.

"What's the matter with you?" Danny rasped, harshly, to my ear. "Move on!—do you want them on our necks?"

And he shoved past me, catching up the candlestick from where it gleamed against the polished surface of an ancient console-table.

But still there in the doorway I swayed and faltered, for with his movement tall portrait-frames in tarnished splendor glinted like golden lances marshaling athwart our way; the spectral figures within seemed to stir to life and frowningly confer, questioning the meaning of the tatterdemalions intruding in their midst.

"Some class, eh?" breathed Danny, unabashed. And he muttered, "There should be good pickings —*good!*"

And now, upon the very threshold of our hazard, my young pal's impish spirit of whimsy must needs indulge itself to contradiction of all caution. He set the candle down a moment and faced me where I stood hovering just within the door.

With an air he clutched his knobbed and knotted road-stick against his hip in simulation of a sword, and, lifting his limp and dusty alpine as though it were of plumed velvet, swept it to the floor before me with all the grace of a cavalier of old.

"Welcome, Sir Dominie!" he said, with throaty gravity. "We bid thee right welcome to our ancestral halls!"

V

A GIRL'S LETTER

I GESTURED impatiently.

"Have done!" I snarled. "Leave the play-acting till we need it later!"

I pushed him toward the stairs.

He slid up them like a cat; so swift was he, I was hard put to keep a yard or two behind his heels. Once we had gained the security of the room above, he turned the big brass key of the door and lay back against the panels, affecting a tragic limpness.

"At last!" he breathed, faintly.

But for all his foolishness, his eyes took swift and comprehensive inspection of everything in sight.

He whistled softly.

"I say, Dominie"—with some excitement—"this is something like, eh?"

He strode coolly about, summarily jerking open drawers, his dust-white shoes tracking the dark pile of the carpet. For the moment I remained where I was, fingering my shabby old derby, my eyes ranging the coziness of the big room with its comfortable, old-time furnishings—the high-post bed of rosewood quaintly carved, the lighted lamp with its

crystal globe glowing like a mellow moon, the cheery, sputtering fire, the high wooden mantel crowned with its long Colonial mirror. And here my glance ended, focusing upon a tiny splash of white—the square outline of an envelope sticking in the corner of the glass. But I was staring at it absently, giving little heed to the thing itself just then.

For I was thinking what a fool a man was to go a-wandering when he had comfort and independence in a home like this. Yet it was always the way, I reflected, bitterly: those who had didn't value, while those who had not—

"Say, you!—you wake up—get a move on!" hissed my pal. With hat canted awry, he lurched out of a closet, his arms bourgeoning with suits and hangers. "Dominie, we've simply got to tear!"

Together we lined up before the long mantel-glass. But no longer did it reflect two scarecrow figures in looped and windowed raggedness.

Instead I saw a good-looking young man in a well-fitting suit of gray tweed pointed by a modish collar and a flowing tie into which he had stabbed a jeweled pin. About his mouth hovered the ghost of a whimsical smile. In his brown eyes danced little motes of fun, as though, in truth, it were but some boyish game we played. I saw beside him an elderly man to whom a double-breasted frock and a clerical adaptation of collar and scarf gave a dignity strangely reminiscent; a man with grave, aquiline face—scholarly, as you might say—yet with a grim set of jaw that seemed oddly at variance with troubled, wistful eyes.

Danny grinned at me in the glass, then stirred restlessly, looking toward the door.

"Gee!"—impatiently—"is that nigger *never* going to call us!" He pressed his hand comically to his stomach.

"Patience!" I soothed him.

I was starving-hungry myself, but oddly stimulated now by excitement. Besides, my cravings were tempered by apprehension of the forthcoming encounter with the other servants. Even with Uncle Alex the resemblance might not stand the searching challenge of nearness and a stronger light. It was all a forlorn hope—a desperate chance. But it *was* a chance, and I knew we would not sacrifice it, though even now we could easily win to safety by flight.

Meantime, as I reflected, our waiting-time had not been so unprofitable. And just then, answering my very thought, Danny fished out the handsome gold repeater he had found in the chamber beyond the connecting lavatory.

"Not so bad!" he murmured, complacently. "Some cannister!—eh, Dominie?" And he asked me for the fifth time what I thought it might be worth.

"I don't know; but I wouldn't give these for it." I flashed the two twenty-dollar "gold-boys" taken from the beaded purse I had discovered in a little side-drawer of the old bureau.

"Keepsakes," said my pal, with a wry face. "I'd as soon take the coins off a dead man's eyes."

I sneered—contemptuous for his superstition—

and replied that I would take those sooner, as a dead man had no use for money.

"Like this chap." I jerked a nod at the room.

"Say," said Danny, musingly, "it *is* funny about that letter! Where is it? What did we do with it?"

His hand found it, stowed in his own pocket—the letter we had found sticking in the mirror.

I leaned over him, reading it again.

They are saying you will never come back to me; that you are dead, my dear one, buried in the fathoms of some far-off sea. If I thought so, too, I should want to be there by your side instead of here.

But my heart is singing, and the year is up, and I *know* you are coming back to me. And so I am leaving this where you will find it the very first thing when you come back to this quiet room. And Aunt Caroline—isn't she a dear?—says she will keep out of the way till you have read it, so that I may be the first woman in all the world to bid you welcome home.

It was signed simply "Jean."

"Look!—written yesterday!" I said, pointing to the date. "Go on," I jogged him, "turn it over—you're forgetting she had to write a postscript."

Together we read it:

Oh, Dick, I know that even if you were dead you would come back to me and make me feel it, if you could not tell. I know this because I love you so.

My pal and I exchanged glances. He shrugged, his fingers slowly, mechanically, slipping the letter back into its envelope.

I muttered angrily and swore.

"Say!" I snarled, "isn't life hell?"

Danny muttered something, with a helpless gesture. His hand moved to lay the letter in the fire. Then he hesitated, glancing at the mantel-glass.

"I say, Dominie"—he eyed me a little shamefacedly—"let's leave it where we found it—what do you say? Let's let the poor devil come back and read his letter—if he can."

"You are considerate"—my tone edged a little jeeringly; "or is it for the girl you're thinking?"

"What if it is?" sharply. There was a flash of defiance in his dark eye. He flushed. "Dominie, I never told you—but there was a girl once—" He broke off, and his gaze dropped away, lost in the heart of the fire at our feet. "Nothing," he finished, softly; "but she loved, too—this girl!"—he swallowed —"she loved—that way!"

Whereupon, lifting the letter, he put it back as nearly as he could just in the place we had found it. And to a man like myself, old in worldly wisdom, it was amusing to see how the boy handled it, as though it were some sacred thing.

"Mister Dick!"

We jumped at the voice and knock.

"Now for it!" breathed Danny. He squared himself, and, marching resolutely to the door, unlocked and swung it open.

Uncle Alex stood there, grinning and blinking in the rays of a great branching candelabrum. His white hair and skin were carefully groomed, matching the neatness of immaculate linen and tidy serving-jacket.

"'Speck you-all 'mos' starved," he chortled; "but I tell you how 'twas: You see, de chickens 's been roostin' out dar in de mulberry saplin's, but ternight dey took a notion—you know how chickens is—'ain't got a scrap er sense—*La*, Mister Dick"—he lifted high the light—"how you is filled out!"

His smile passed to me, conveying in some subtle way welcome and allegiance for his master's guest.

We wound down the stairs, Uncle Alex leading with the light. Again the portraits seemed to stir to life and whisperingly confer as we passed beneath their eyes. This time, it seemed to me, they titteringly derided the borrowed plumage in which we moved. And it was absurd, but my hand nervously sought and reassured itself of possession of the key that protected our discarded rags.

"Honey! *honey!* Jus' let ol' Car'line have a look at you!"

The big figure that waddled from the dining-room to meet us took the look, while I held my breath. Then, with a crooning cry, she all but clasped Danny to her ample bosom.

"Chile!—Mister Dick!—you is *well*—you is cured, ain't you?—plum cured!" Then she stood off. "*Look* at him, Alex!—did you ever 'speck ter see Mister Dick lookin' laik dat?" Her voice lapsed into a muttering wonder.

Uncle Alex grunted. "Nuver 'speck ter see him 't all, ef you lis'en ter all de foolishness some folks try ter make you b'lieve!"

"Neber min' 'bout dat!—neber min' 'bout dat now!" Aunt Caroline suddenly roused from her

contemplation, her big arms waving him into silence. "Let 'um eat deh supper, nigger, won't you?" Her glance touched me with a curiosity, shy and respectful. Danny presented me with easy informality.

I looked at Danny dazedly as we took our seats in that beautiful old dining-room, the round polished oval of mahogany between us resplendent with its snowy doilies, its delicate old china, its silver gleaming with the noble white sheen that I knew came only through antiquity, long usage, and indefatigable polish and care. Rising from the center of the table between two softly radiant candelabra was a slender crystal vase that embraced a great sheaf of exquisite white roses.

I was looking at these when Uncle Alex paused in his pouring of water and addressed Danny.

"Miss Jean, she send over roses ev'y day ter be put up-sta'rs in yo' room. She do dat ever sence dey begin ter talk 'bout yo' bein' dead." Again Danny and I exchanged glances. "Yes, sir; she say she wanter keep sump'n alive dere jus' ter show she know dat you's alive, too—she ain't carin' w'at dey say. She say she gwine ter keep roses dere till you come home. But Car'line, she bring 'um in heah ternight."

"Oh!" An instant's hesitation, and then Danny reached over for one of the roses and drew it from the vase. With a smile at me, he broke off part of the stem and slipped the rose into his coat. Upon this, Uncle Alex presented me with the vase and I nervously followed suit.

There was another nervous interval as my calloused

fingers fumbled an instant in the act of separating the soft, crushed folds of the big square of linen that lay beside my plate. And to this day I can sense the cool freshness of its feel to my hot hand as I laid it there upon my knee, looking across at my young pal through a dream-mist, trying to beat back the memory of the dead years gone that lay between me and the time when I had last sat thus, an honored guest within a real home.

VI

PLAY-ACTING

"SO, Aunt Caroline, you think I've changed a lot?"

"Changed? La, *honey!*"

Aunt Caroline lifted the spread of her blue gingham apron and let it fall again—a gesture eloquent of the impotency of words.

Danny laughed lightly, took a final swallow with deliberation, and set down his cup with care—a last figment to join the wreck of the wonderful supper that Uncle Alex was removing. This done, he flicked his tie with a stalk of napery, and with smiling calm faced the figure in the doorway.

"How, Aunt Caroline—*how* have I changed?" His tone was whimsically protestant. "Don't I eat as much as—as I used to?"

"As *much?*" Her explosive wabble had echo in a cackle from Uncle Alex, who almost dropped a tray. "Lord-a-mercy, child, I never see you eat as much in all yo' born days as you have to-night. Eat?—my *land* above!" And she bent over, her turbaned head shaking, her black face aglow with delight.

Old Alex tilted a decanter to my glass.

"Didn't never used to eat more'n enough to keep a bird alive," he muttered, pouring. "Po'ly *all* his life long—never eatin' nothin'—mighty finicky app'-tite."

Danny lifted his chair, turning half about. He faced Aunt Caroline squarely.

"Then you don't think I look like myself?" he said.

In the rogue's tone was rueful deprecation—disappointment, even. I would have marveled how he could do it, but that familiarity had long ago dulled the edge of admiration for my pal's histrionic gifts. This sort of play-acting was his delight.

Aunt Caroline hesitated, and the full-orbed study of her eyes was half troubled.

"I dunno—" She broke off, muttering to herself. Then her breath relaxed with a sigh and her big arm made a gesture as though dismissing a baffling problem. "I dunno, honey; it's sump'n, but I dunno w'at it is—I cayn't make it out." Again her gaze concentrated searchingly, wistfully. "I jus' been a-comin' heah to de do', lookin' in an' list'nin' to you-all talkin'; an'—" She hesitated, blinking from Danny to me, then back again. "It's you, an' yet—" Her fingers gathered her apron, working with the folds.

"Yes?" invited Danny.

His teeth flashed, and he boldly shot a wink at Uncle Alex.

I smiled urbanely.

It was very still. Somewhere afar on the turnpike droned the purr of an automobile; then its

siren bit into the night's peace. An interval, and it sounded again, but fainter, dying away.

I saw the muscles of Danny's throat move as he swallowed.

"Well?" he said, smiling.

Aunt Caroline stirred. She spread her hands and dropped them helplessly in a gesture of surrender.

"La, *I* don't know!"

For all Danny's bounce, I detected in the lift of his chest something like a breath of relief. Yet he shot a glance at me, roguish and exulting; and in the way he lifted his knee and hugged it there was an element of boyish glee. Parlous as the situation was, he was extracting from it a certain enlivenment. I knew this, because I knew Danny.

"I say, Aunt Caroline"—and again his eye telegraphed me—"maybe what you notice is that I've grown ever so much better-looking!" He coughed, grinning at her with frank impudence.

Aunt Caroline grunted.

"Huh! no, you ain't!"—she delivered herself shortly, and this time with assurance. "Come to dat, you ain't nigh *as* good-lookin' as you wuz!—*no*, sir!"

"Oh!"

And, though Danny laughed, he was obviously taken aback. The more so as my involuntary laugh was answered by a half-suppressed chortle from Uncle Alex.

"No, sir," Aunt Caroline proceeded, with conviction, "it ain't nothin' 'bout yo' looks—'cept maybe de way you looks outer yo' eyes—an' 'tain't nothin'

'bout yo' voice. It's jus' sump'n—" Again she shook her head helplessly. "La, child"—with a sigh—"I dunno w'at to call it. I might say"—she took a heaving breath—"I might say, honey, dat somehow you ain't laik de same man—no, sir"—impressively—"*not de same man!*"

Not the same man! An hour ago the unconscious challenge would have acted upon me like a cold douche cast upon a slinking cur. An hour ago I had faltered timorously, fearful of this old woman-servant's instant penetration of the veil of our mad imposture. An hour ago—or but little more—I had crouched in the darkness out there, a ragged, dirt-grimed outcast, forlorn and hungry—miserably apprehensive of challenge from the household's meanest dog.

An hour ago! And now the fingers that obeyed my will lifted the stem of the wine-glass and held it to my lips without a tremble—steady as a crane of steel. Moreover, my face as I saw it mirrored above the old Empire sideboard was unaffectedly serene—my lips touched by a quiet smile—an expression interested yet half amused.

Supper and the wine, you say.

Aye, friend, I do not forget that! And it is not for me to forget the concomitant of good clothes, clean linen, and the smooth, ivory-like feel of skin laved free of the moil of those dust-clogged rags. These things were there, but there was something else, withal: a heartening of spirit—a reassurance—not all inspired by decent raiment or the body's freshening.

No, I was feeling a stiffening due to the amazing realization that Danny's identity was really unquestioned by these old negroes—retainers who had watched the master of the house grow from boyhood; that while the old woman, groping intuitively, sensed a difference, she really never for an instant suspected the truth. To both of them it was "Mister Dick" sitting there—Mister Dick who had come home to his own, and in some marvelous way was strong and well again. It was what they wanted to believe—it was what they *did* believe!

I looked at the old "Willard" clock against the wall and exulted that in two hours' time—three at the most—every soul upon the place would be asleep except ourselves. We would be alone in the house, and—and the night was long!

I even found myself wondering curiously where we should be when, with another round of the clock, they should be "calling" us in the morning. I could trust Danny's wit to make provision that we should not be called very early. Yes, I could trust to everything like that—I could trust his *savoir-faire* to play his rôle and play it ably in every way. What I could *not* trust was his elfish propensity to jest—his whimsical temerity to test just how thin the ice might be.

"Your health, Doctor!"

I started, coming out of my reflections. My young pal was lifting his wine-glass, as yet untouched, gesturing it lightly toward my head. His eyes gleamed with a message of congratulation for our luck, for triumph in our security for the night.

"Your health, Doctor!" he repeated; then, with eyes steady, he added, boldly, "*and our good luck!*"

I gravely inclined my head.

Now, it was a wine of rare bouquet and flavor; a wine—as only an old man knows—that is for the palate's delectation, not for the stomach's grosser lulling. So between my lips I drew again the merest spoonful; but Danny took half his glass in a swallow. With eyes sparkling from its potency, he faced Aunt Caroline again.

"So you don't think I look like the same man, eh?" He smiled up at her boldly, daringly. "Well, Aunt Caroline"—he finished the wine in a quick gulp—"who knows!—perhaps I'm *not* the same man!"

I set down my glass abruptly, gripping the table's edge.

"Say," laughed Danny, "wouldn't that be a joke, now, if I wasn't, eh?"

"Oh, you fool—you fool!" In hot rage I breathed it, yearning to shout it at him. As it was, I dared not even hiss a warning.

Besides, I felt it was too late; one glimpse of the old woman's face and I went cold with a sudden apprehension that the speech had done its work. A stare, and then with a sudden frightened consternation her eyes left Danny's face and locked glances with Uncle Alex.

On the instant, I heard the old man grunt oddly, and his hand abruptly set down the decanter.

Meantime, my young friend was groping absently in his pocket. It was the movement of habit—the

impulse of one whose only present concern lay in a desire to smoke. He had forgotten that his pipe reposed up-stairs upon the mantel; had forgotten the fact that he had no more tobacco—had even forgotten where he was for the instant. Even as I looked, remembrance came—his face fell blankly.

Now, with Danny, the wanting of anything was but a trifling preliminary to going after it. So when I saw his glance rove covertly to sideboard and buffet and come to rest smilingly, wistfully, upon the old negro butler, I knew that his assurance was about to pile further outrage.

"And, Uncle Alex," he exclaimed, in a pleasant, offhand way, "I expect Doctor Blair here would like to smoke after his din—his supper." The smile he flashed me was hospitably solicitous, almost apologetic. "Haven't we some cigars somewhere?" His laugh was mellow, deprecatory. "I confess I'm nearly dead for a smoke myself."

His finger pushed his wine-glass a half-inch toward the old man.

"And we'll have some more wine, please," he added, carelessly.

Uncle Alex merely swayed slightly. Beyond this, he never moved.

An instant, and Danny's eyes lifted to him; then they shifted to me, questioning, in a lightning glance. But I could only sit there with wooden face; I dared not flick an eyelash. The air seemed powder-charged!

His gaze passed on indifferently, roving the walls, tripping at last upon the old clock. My heart sank

as he forthwith fished out the heavy watch he had copped up-stairs and began deliberately setting his prize—under the very eyes of the owner's servants. Not only that, but incidentally I detected that the movements of his hands masked a furtive weighing and appraising of the gold.

Now, all at once as I watched him, marveling that he did not seem to note the change in atmosphere, I felt his foot touch the table somewhere.

Rap! rap! rap!—oh, so lightly—and then a rap—And then the whole repeated.

And oh, what relief! For it was an old prison signal, born in the exigencies of the night's silence and loneliness, when from somewhere in the kenneled hell about you a moan comes stealing out of a man's soul—and you know a comrade needs heartening.

It heartened me now, for it told me that Danny was on guard. With the realization of it, half my apprehension vanished. For I knew the resourcefulness of my young pal's keen wits, of his buoyant assurance, his ingenuity, his colossal self-confidence, and pure cold nerve—when he was on guard! And he was now—I was sure of it.

Forthwith, I drew a deep breath and rested upon him like a granite rock.

With deliberation Danny returned the watch to his pocket. Then for the first time he seemed to notice the attitude of the old butler. His eyes widened.

"Why, Uncle Alex!" His voice was gentle, touched, the surprised remonstrance a mother might use in addressing a refractory child. "Some wine,

please!" He smiled. "I don't believe you heard me."

A pause, and then:

"*I* heerd you all right!"

The words were chopped grimly, even sullenly. From Aunt Caroline came an echo—an indescribable sound, except that it might be compared to the cluck of an outraged hen.

In the silence that followed I could hear the clock tick.

Danny turned to me with a short laugh.

"I don't know what our guest must be thinking of us," he said, deliberately; "I'm afraid some apology is due for our manners, Doctor Blair."

A simple enough speech; one that I recognized instantly as a blind feeling in the dark—an effort to gain time and find the lay of the land. Its effect, however, was a surprise.

The old servant shrank as from a blow. The next instant, with a sucking gasp, he clutched the decanter and stumbled to Danny's side, muttering to himself, pouring with a hand so eager that the liquid brimmed over upon the table.

My pal stared, as well he might; then a grin woke in his face.

"Say, what's the matter with you two, anyway?" he adventured, boldly, and addressed the remark to Aunt Caroline, whose eyes were still holding him in troubled alarm.

Again the two negroes looked at each other.

Danny's mouth twisted at me in a puzzled grimace. I could only lift my eyebrows helplessly.

So we all remained while you might have counted ten. Then Danny's head went up in a little reckless jerk that to me was familiar.

He straightened in his chair.

"Do you know, Doctor"—and he essayed a chuckle—"hang me if I don't believe they've just about got half a notion that we're some impostors!" The blow of his fist upon the table made the candles leap. "Yes, sir; that's just what it looks like!" he proclaimed, loudly. With hands in his pockets, he teetered his chair backward, turning a rueful smile upon the lowering image in the doorway. "By George, Aunt Caroline, I knew I must have changed in looks a good deal—traveling all over the world as I have these months, but I didn't know I had changed *that* much!"

The turbaned figure shifted.

"La, Mister Dick!"—and oh, what a warm surge of relief I felt as she thus addressed him—w'at you 'speck?" She seemed to sniff. "Yes, sir, w'at you 'speck w'en you come home actin' so—so *funny?*"

My pal suddenly let down his chair gently, decorously upon all fours. He looked not unlike a small boy suffering rebuke.

"Um! I'm afraid I *have* fallen into some bad habits traveling," he murmured; "one gets into careless ways living at hotels." Danny coughed. "You'll have to excuse me, Aunt Caroline!"

Aunt Caroline's hand went to her mouth. She ducked, with a convulsive tee-hee.

"La, honey, 'tain't nothin' fer *me* ter 'scuse you 'bout!" she avowed. "No harm as *I* see in yo'

drinkin' a little wine if you *wants* to!" And there was a confirmative grunt from Uncle Alex. "Only it did seem kinder funny w'en you"—she tittered shyly—"w'en you al'ays been goin' in so fer pro'-bish'n an' temp'rance! *Dat* w'at got *me* flustered!"

Danny, in the act of lifting his wine-glass, set it down abruptly.

"Oh yes!" he said, feebly; "that's so!"

So *this* was the kernel of the mystery! The glances we exchanged were a little foolish.

Meantime, Uncle Alex, stooping above Danny, gave the table's surface a superfluous wipe.

"Yes, sir, *dat's* w'at 'uz de matter wid me," he mumbled, penitently. "I wuz 'spectin' you ter jus' sorter lif' de glass laik you al'ays done; I *knowed* you wa'n't gwine t' touch it no more'n if 'twuz pisen. An' den w'en I see you fling it down jus' laik a nigger t'row a dram—o-o-*umph!*"—he shook his grizzled head—"law-*sie!* I wuz so kerflum-muxed I plum disremember'd fer a minit 'bout deh bein' comp'ny!" In the old-fashioned deference and respect with which he turned to me I read the desire to right himself with his master's guest. The old fool's faded eyes were wistful that the explanation might enable me to make some allowance.

Aunt Caroline rubbed her nose, smiling.

"Dat didn't get me so laik him askin' fer *see*-gars. I mean," she added, explaining to me, "laik he gwine ter smoke one, too. La, w'en Alex come heah tellin' me he see Mister Dick smokin' one down dar by de fence I wuz jus' sure he wuz projeckin'. 'Tell *you*"—shaking her head—"I had dat 'ar

rollin'-pin back dar in meh han' den an' I come *mighty* nigh haulin' off an' jus'—"

"*Nuver* said it!" growled Uncle Alex, and with indignation; "nuver said he wuz smokin' no see-gar! I said pipe!" He glowered at her through his steel-rimmed spectacles. "Umph! an' dat ain't nothin', nohow; ain't no worse 'n him takin' a dram; an' *dat* ain't nothin' 't all—not fer white folks dat's gent'men!" His drop of eyelids in my direction was courtesy itself. "Laik ter know ef Mister Dick's pa—an' Marse Richard, too—ef dey didn't do bof—huh? Anybody in Tenn'see ever say *dey* ain't gent'men?—umph! I reckon not! Never no talk 'bout dis yer pro'bish'n in dem days! No, sir, nobody never see or heah tell uv it! But lem-*me* tell you sump'n!"—the oracle's voice changed—"dey wa'n't no need fer no pro'bish'n in dem days! 'Cause why? 'Cause dey wa'n't none er dis yer permiscus drinkin' laik dey is now—*no*, sir. Gent'men 'at *wuz* gent'men, dey drink in deh own homes an' one 'nuther's, an' dey made a p'int er knowin' how ter drink an' still *be* gent'men—yessir! An' *dat*," finished the old darky, out of breath, but in triumph, "wuz why dey *stayed* gent'men!"

"Sure!" said Danny, pursing his lips. "That's the way I got to thinking about it from traveling in Europe; especially"—he twisted at me a sardonic smile—"especially in England." Here his hand again strayed mechanically to his pocket. "You—er—see, that's how I learned to smoke," he explained in hypocritical plaint, "it was so lonesome traveling."

Aunt Caroline droned sympathetically. "La, honey, I jus' bet it wuz! I's so glad you done learn how ter smoke; an' I bet"—she smiled into her hand —"I bet Miss Jean, she be glad, too."

Danny's fingers came out of his pocket. He looked at the sideboard, then expectantly at Uncle Alex. But the old man merely rubbed his chin, blinking at him sheepishly.

"An' deh ain't a t'ing in dis house ter smoke," he muttered, sorrowfully; "not even a scrapin' uv terbacker!"

"What!" Danny gasped it in genuine dismay.

Uncle Alex's head dropped. He looked downright miserable.

Aunt Caroline's face had the expression of a thunder-cloud.

"Go on, nigger; whyn't you tell him?" She rumbled it forth in a mandatory growl. "How you reck'n Mister Dick goin' ter know w'at you mean?" She turned to Danny, her eyes firing. "It jus' yo' cousin—dat Doctor Chilton, Mister Dick—*you* know!" Her intonation expressed strong dislike. "He come heah ev'ry day now 'most, cavortin' 'roun' laik de place done a'ready belong ter him. Reckon he t'ink it do, too," she muttered; "he say you dead!"

I gestured shocked amazement. "Well, upon my word, Dick!"

Uncle Alex put in. "He tol' *me* you wuz dead!" he mumbled.

"Yes, sir," Aunt Caroline went on; "an' 's I 'uz gwine ter tell you, he got ter smokin' outer yo' boxes

uv comp'ny see-gars an' cig'rets till dey 'uz all used up. But some frien' send you a box er fine see-gars heah las' Chris'mas wid a card dat say, 'fer de unconverted.' Miss Jean laugh an' say dey mus' be mish'nary see-gars. He send some cig'rets, too—a box bigg'r'n meh hand."

"Oh!" said Danny, brightening.

"Well, sir"—she took a deep breath—"Doctor Chilton, he smoke up ev'ry las' one er dem see-gars!"

"An' all yo' cig'rets!" from Uncle Alex, grimly.

Danny reddened angrily.

"Well, damn his impudence!" exploded from his lips.

The outburst was impulsive and unaffected, and the indignation of the real master of the house could not have rung truer; for the tragic prospect of a tobaccoless night, with all we had before us, touched my young pal upon the raw. Under the circumstances, the conduct of Doctor Chilton invited his honest, personal resentment.

Aunt Caroline's head was in her apron.

"Lawsie mercy!" came in a muffled giggle; "jus' listen to Mister Dick a-cussin'!" She looked up, grinning wonderingly. "An' he say he ain't changed none!—oo-*umph!*"

The old man-servant looked at Danny, his leathery, wrinkled face brightening with dog-like affection and pride.

"He soun' jus' laik Marse Richard!" he sighed.

VII

I HEAR ABOUT JEAN

"UNCLE ALEX," said Danny, carelessly, "didn't I hear you telephoning some one just now?"

The old darky looked abashed.

"'Twa'n't nobody but de Judge," he mumbled, fidgeting over the sideboard. "Somebody passin' 'long de pike out dere see de lights an' ax de Judge ef you 'uz back. Dat w'at he tel'phone 'bout."

I thrilled uncomfortably and looked at my pal aslant.

"I see," said Danny. He eyed Uncle Alex thoughtfully, calculatingly. "Did you tell him I was here?" he asked, and arose. I remained seated, obeying his sign.

The old man cleared his throat. "I—yes, sir; course I had to," he faltered; "but I tol' him you had comp'ny come wid you." He was obviously ill at ease and cast a covert, apprehensive glance at Aunt Caroline, who, with hands upon hips, was regarding him severely.

She leveled a fat finger.

"Look a-heah, nigger!" she exploded, "why cayn't you tell de truf?" Her thick lips pouched and Uncle

Alex shrank. "Mister Dick, you know w'at he done? He done gone hisself an' tell de Judge you is heah; an' I tol' him *'tic'lar* not ter do it!" She bristled wrathfully. "Didn't I tell you Mister Dick 'd be wantin' ter slip up dere hisself bime-by an' s'prise Miss Jean? My lan', ef you ain't de *beatenes'* fool 'bout some t'ings ever lived *I* know!"

And she went on, till under the enfilade of wrath Uncle Alex beat retreat, murmuring something about seeing if the library fire was burning.

Danny had been standing with face attentive, his eyes shadowed by a slight perplexity. Of a sudden he addressed me with courteous gravity, excusing himself.

"Aunt Caroline," he said, smiling, "Doctor Blair here is a coffee fiend; and though he won't say so, I know he is dying for just one more cup. Yes, you are, Doctor"—with a glance—"you see, I know you!"

Now, as a matter of fact, I cared little or nothing for coffee, tea being my beverage, as Danny knew. But in the glance he leveled I read significance—command. Aunt Caroline, glowing delightedly, was already bustling her way to the kitchen.

A stride, and my pal bent to my ear.

"It's up to you, Dominie, to find out about this Judge—who he is, and whether he is likely to look in."

I nodded understandingly. As a stranger, I could ask questions that would come amiss from the master of the house.

A sour smile touched Danny's lips. "Isn't this the worst?"

I snarled. "I could kill that doddering, meddling old fool—"

"'Sh-h!" And he was gone.

"'Speck dis coffee 'mos' got cold," panted Aunt Caroline, entering. "Mandy done let de fire go down or I'd 'a' het it up."

She waited anxiously as I tested the cup's contents.

"It's delicious," I enthused; "just right!"

Aunt Caroline beamed.

"The Judge," I said, with an air of detached interest, "one of Dick's neighbors?"

In five minutes I was in possession of the important information that "the Judge" was Judge Logan, living some miles farther out the turnpike; and that he was the family's oldest and nearest friend. He was not only "Mister Dick's" legal adviser, but had been looking after his business affairs during his absence. Moreover, he was "Miss Jean's" uncle.

Whereupon, I "remembered" having heard it all before!

Oh, why, of course!—Judge Logan—why, Dick had spoken of him—oh, a thousand times, and I had been *so* anxious to meet him. Didn't she think it likely the Judge might look in during the evening?

Aunt Caroline looked doubtful. No, she didn't think the Judge was likely to do anything like that—no, indeed!—not the first night Mister Dick had a guest at his home.

And she explained, simply: "'Cause he know better!"

He knew better! There was infinite relief to me

in the way she said it. It was borne to me that this old retainer was not merely voicing an opinion; she was pronouncing a social code.

"Dear, dear! that's too bad!" I murmured, comfortably.

"But I tell you, do', w'at maybe *is* gwine ter happen"—here a waxing grin exploded in a tee-hee into her hand. "But don't you tell Mister Dick I tol' you."

"Certainly not." But again came uneasiness.

"Well, 't wouldn't s'prise me might'ly if, after you-all had sot an' talked erwhile, ef Mister Dick didn't ax you ef you wouldn't 'scuse him, an' he slip off up dere ter say a word ter Miss Jean."

"Ah-h!" I closed one eye with foxy astuteness, beaming at her with what might seem a gentle old man's kindly tolerance for the romance of youth.

She eyed me slyly, wistfully.

"Reckon you know all 'bout Miss Jean—I 'speck he talk 'bout her a heap."

"Raves about her!" I lifted my eyes eloquently.

Aunt Caroline gurgled happily. I wouldn't wonder that he did when I saw her, she said. She was the prettiest thing in Tennessee, Miss Jean was—and the best.

"Ain't nuthin' highfalutin' or stuck-up 'bout Miss Jean—*no*, sir! You'd t'ink dey might be, consid'rin' who her folks is, an' how she's been raised—but dey ain't. An' pop'lar!—my lan'!" She shook her head. "Y' oughter see de way de young sprigs sasshays out dis pike—do' dey ain't got no mo' chance wid Miss Jean dan—dan nuthin'! De las' one uv 'um

knows dat, but dey jus' keep fussin' 'bout her still, laik a fly buzzin' 'roun' a ciaer-bar'l. But den dey all uv 'um done stop pesterin' her 'bout marryin' 'um. Dat is, all but dat 'ar—"

She checked herself, scowling. Her words died in a rumble.

"Who, Aunt Caroline?"

She looked cautiously toward the hall.

"You—you ain't gwine tell Mister Dick I say anyt'ing?"

My reply was reassuring.

"Well, den"—with a deep breath—"it dat Doctor Chilton; an' I jus' wanter tell you he ain't up ter no good—now you heah *me!*"

"Ah!" I nodded with an air of being impressed and sympathetic. "Doctor Chilton—seems to me I've heard Dick speak of him."

"Course you has—dat his cousin, de las' hair an' hide uv kin he got in de worl'." She grunted. "But dat ain't sayin' much!"

I hazarded an anxious question as to whether Doctor Chilton lived near.

"Lawsie, no!" The very suggestion seemed to induce consternation. "He lives in town, but he comes trapesin' out heah 'bout ev'ry uther day, jowerin' 'roun' an' givin' orders ter ev'ybody on de place. My lan'!"—with a sniff—"I don' know w'at we would 'a' done ef 't had turned out dat Mister Dick 'uz shore 'nuf dead laik Doctor Chilton say he am."

An odd curiosity pricked me. "I wonder why he thinks so."

"I dunno. He say he dead, but you see he ain't, don't you? So w'at dat 'mount to!" She twisted her shoulders with contemptuous sniff. "I 'speck he *want* ter t'ink him dead!"

I tried to look clerically shocked.

She rolled her eyes. "La, honey," with a smile, pitying and motherly, "you don' know de worl' laik I do; you 'ain't got no ide' fer a minit how wicked folks kin be. You preachers is laik lambs."

My sigh admitted my pastoral innocence.

"Yes, sir; an' 'bout Doctor Chilton: I tell you I know dat man—you needn't tell *me!* He want ter t'ink Mister Dick dead, 'cause den he 'herit ev'yt'ing he got." She went on, encouraged by my demonstration of interest. "You see, he Mister Dick's fus' cousin—de las' hide an' hair uv kin folks he got in de whol' worl' sence ol' Miss die. But he don't act laik no kin folks, 'cept I'm boun' ter say he bin mighty 'tentive doctorin' Mister Dick." She made the concession reluctantly. "He de one dat fin' out dat Mister Dick got—got—" She hesitated, looking at me. "W'at dat long word dey calls it w'en dey got sump'n de matter wid deir lungs?"

"Tuberculosis."

"Dat it. He fin' Mister Dick got it or goin' ter get it mighty bad. So he 'suade him ter take a sea-voy'ge an' trabel fer a year. You r'member how white he use' ter be?"

How white indeed! But the whiteness I remembered was of prison pallor; the brand of Danny's three years' confinement in the cells of San Quentin.

"An' dat ain't all he 'suade him"—her face clouded—"he 'suade him he 'ain't got no right t' wanter keep Miss Jean boun' ter him 'less he see he gwine ter git well. He say while he gone he ought'n ter write t' Miss Jean 't all; an' not ter ask her ter write. Well, sir, Mister Dick don' pay no 'tention ter him at fus'; he jus' kinder laff at him. But his cousin, he keep a-workin' an' a-workin'; an' fine'ly one day he spit out dat ef Mister Dick 'uz honor'ble ez his pa an' Marse Richard he'd act de way he 'vise him. An' *dat*, sir, fetch Mister Dick up short! Now, how come I know all dis is 'cause dey 'uz talkin' in de nex' room—an' I jus' natcherly heah 'um tru de keyhole."

"My! my!" I murmured, "how fortunate that was!"

"It sutt'ny wuz, as I'm gwine ter tell you. Well, sir, dat man 'ain't much more'n got Mister Dick off 'fore he come a-honeyin' 'roun' Miss Jean, tryin' ter undermine him; seein' ef he couldn't cut him out—und'stand? It 'uz de veh nex' week after Mister Dick go 'way. I r'member, 'cause Miss Jean 'd druv over in her 'lectric ter see ef we-all—dat's Alex an' me—had heerd anyt'ing. She 'ain't heah a t'ing, she say; an' she look so pale an' sweet—jus' laik one dem roses. She 'llow maybe sump'n happen ter Mister Dick. An' while I 'uz tellin' her dey couldn't nuthin' happen ter Mister Dick, I look outer de winder, an' who should be sasshayin' up de driveway but Doctor Chilton! You see, he spy her 'lectric standin' out dere in front. He jus' pole right on in de li'bary whar Miss Jean is, an' de

fus' t'ing I know I heah him tellin' 'bout gettin' a letter f'om New York f'om Mister Dick. De reason I heah him 'uz 'cause I have ter come back in dere ter put some mo' coal on de fire an' kinder brush eroun' de h'arf. So I jus' p'intedly couldn't help hearin' w'at dey 'uz talkin' 'bout."

"Well, I should say not!" I encouraged.

"He 'uz tellin' her 'bout w'at a gran' time Mister Dick been havin', galivantin' ter de op'ra an' de fine rest'rants after de shows; an' he let out—like it a kind uv slip—'bout him writin' so much 'bout some young lady—I disrememb'r her name; but anyhow she live up on some highfalutin' driveway dere.

"'But o' course,' he say to her, 'in tellin' you dis I'm jus' bringin' new coal inter de castle'—I t'ink dat w'at he say—an' he smile kinder serkastic. ''Cause, uv course,' he say, 'you know mo' 'bout all dis dan I do.'

"But huh! he never draw nuthin' outer Miss Jean—no, sir! She jus' kinder smile wid her chin up higher 'n her collar stays an' den she turn 'roun' ter me whar I 'uz pickin' up some scraps o' lint w'at I spied under de aidge uv de rug.

"'Soon 's you ready, Aunt Car'line,' she say, 'I'll take you in town wid me ter pick out dat cedar chist.'

"Well, sir, I got to tell you I wall'd my eyes up at her fer a minit, 'cause I 'ain't nuver heah 'bout no cedar chist befo'; but I 'spicion' sump'n right off, an' I tell her I got ter go right 'way ef I git back in time ter put on meh dinner. She say, 'You

hurry, den, Car'line'; an' she git right up an' stan' waitin'. Well, sir, w'en I git out in de hall—on de way ter git meh hat an' shawl—I stop a minit by de doah ter kinder straighten a picture dat 'uz sorter wopper-jawed, an' heah him say, 'You break yo' springs wid dat ol' hip'pot'mus.' Now, w'at you t'ink er dat?"

"Outrageous!" I pronounced, indignantly.

"Well, anyhow, I did go in wid her—an' she order me a chist, too. But w'en we 'uz startin' off, Doctor Chilton come out ter de po'ch, lookin' kinder put out; but she tell him good-by in de smilin'est, laffenest way. Dis until her an' me git 'roun' de turn uv de pike; an' den I see she 'uz lookin' straight ahead 'cross dat li'le steerin'-pole an' kinder draggin' her lip tru her li'le teeth; an' I seed by de shinin' uv her eyes dat she 'uz jus' 'bout bubblin' over ter cry. So I jus' reach over an' cotch her hand dere on de pole, an'—*lawsie* mercy! ef we didn't jus' miss jerkin' into a ditch, we went so wibble-wobbly fer a minit. I say, 'Don' you min' 'bout dat man, honey! Deh ain't nuthin' true 'cept dat Mister Dick jus' worship de groun' you walk on. He ain't nuver t'inkin' 'bout nobody but you!'

"At dat she jus' look at me kinder misty an' quick smilin'—jus' laik de sun flashin' tru de clouds an' off ag'in some cloudy days—an' she say, 'I know!' wid de deepes' bref; an' den I know she wa'n't troubled none 'bout *dat*. 'But oh, Aunt Car'line,' she say, 'how kin men be so mean!' An' I knowed she ain't meanin' Mister Dick nuther!

"'An' 'ain't you heerd nuthin' f'om him, 't all,

honey?' I ax her; an' we'd got into town an' 'uz purty neah over de Cumb'lan' River bridge by dat time.

"'No,' she say, kinder mournful.

"'Well, I tell you sump'n else,' I say. 'You ain't a-gwine ter heah!'

"She look at me kinder scared an' curi's; an' den I jus' up flat-footed an' tol' her all I heah dat day.

"By dat time we 'uz right on de pub'ic square, an' all uv a sudden she jus' stop de 'lectric right in de middle uv a whol' passel uv market-waggins.

"'La, honey,' I say ter her, 'is you gwine marketin'?' An' I 'uz hopin' she wuz, 'cause I see a nigger wid some 'possums an' groun'-hogs, an' I t'ink I git Miss Jean ter git one fer me ter take home ter Alex. But she say, 'No, I ain't gwine marketin'; but I tell you w'at I *am* gwine ter do'; an' she look at me wid her eyes jus' a-shinin'. 'I'm gwine ter hug you right heah, you dear ol' t'ing!' An wid dat she up an' done it right smack dere in front er de cote-house, wid ev'ybody 'roun' jus' starin' an' grinnin' fit ter kill."

It was obviously the end of her story, and I was glad enough. As she finished, I finished my coffee and arose, feeling reasonably assured that none of these people of whom I had heard was likely to trouble my pal or me to-night.

As for the morrow—I fingered the "gold boys" in my pocket, feeling comfort in their touch. In any case they were enough to insure flight and safety afar, even if the hours between now and dawn should yield no further spoil.

VIII

A TELEPHONE CALL

I DID not see Danny at first when I entered the library. Then I spied him in a corner, stooping low over some dark, square outline. As I drew nearer I saw it was a safe.

"A 'gopher'!" I breathed, excited.

He nodded absently, his head turning to see if I had closed the door.

"What on earth!" he began, with a touch of impatience; "I thought you were going to stay in there all night." To my surprise his forehead was tightened in lines of worry.

He stood up, facing me. "Well"—sharply—"what did you find?"

I told him in as few words as possible.

"Never mind about her," he chopped me short as I began about the girl; "that cuts no ice with us. It's this business man—this neighbor, Judge Logan." He looked at me anxiously. "Do you think it likely he will come here to-night?"

I shook my head. "Not likely. He would think you too tired; and besides, the nigger told him you had a guest." I smiled.

Danny looked thoughtful.

"I don't like it, Dominie," he said, uneasily. "Great Scott! suppose he did come!" In his face was a sudden flare of panic.

"Stuff!" I said. "He's not coming. It 'll be your ticket to go see the girl—"

"What!" gasped Danny. He looked at me in panic. "You're crazy!"

"I don't mean you *are* going, you boob, but that's what they'll *think* you'll be doing—don't you see? The Judge will keep mum, thinking you're coming over—or up, or wherever it is—to surprise the girl. So he'll wait for you to come."

"And when I don't?"

I shrugged. "He'll keep on waiting, thinking you are detained because of your guest." I smirked, ironically.

He eyed me steadily, his lip tightening.

"All the same, I think we're on pretty thin crust." He moved to one of the tall windows, peering out through the hangings.

I looked about me with interest. It was a stately room, high-ceilinged and long, its walls buttressed with books upon books in faded bindings, and relieved from gloom by the glow of a large lamp upon the table and the warm cheer that spread, fan-like, from a flaming soft-coal fire. Above this was a mantel of snowy marble; and still above was the full-length portrait of a young man in gray regimentals.

I was staring at this when Danny spoke again.

"I'll tell you what," he murmured, still looking out, "I'll be glad when we're away from all this!"

Away from all this!

I sank into the embrace of a big, luxurious chair and drew a sigh. In my ears was the lazy, snug sputtering of the cozy fire, and my hands felt the pleasant warmth that struck across the shining brass fender and the white, resplendent hearth. Somewhere, far away, sounded the soft laughter and cadences of servants' voices, and I closed my eyes, thinking of Aunt Caroline and Uncle Alex and their comforting ministrations.

A gust of wind tried the sashes of the big windows, then passed on; I could hear it ranging through the cedars of the driveway. It sounded chill and comfortless.

"You don't think"—I found myself uttering the words involuntarily—"you don't feel safe in our risking another day?"

"Here?" My pal's amazed explosion brought my eyes open. He drew nearer, staring; then, as I smiled: "Say, but you scared me! Honestly, I thought you were in earnest."

I cleared my throat.

"Well, I am," I said, stolidly.

"What!" Danny looked at me uncertainly, but with eyes twinkling. "*Yes* you are!" he scoffed.

I inclined my head obstinately.

"I believe"—soberly—"we would be perfectly safe in doing it."

Danny stared an instant, as if he thought me fairly bereft. Then he caught up a long poker from its holder and began savagely jabbing a fussy little flame of gas.

"Say, have you gone *plumb* crazy?" His tone was aggrieved, disgusted. I started to speak, but a flick of his arm checked me. "Do you think for a minute that a man like this Judge Logan wouldn't spot the fraud at once?" He glared at me amazedly, incredulously. "What on earth are you talking about?"

With a scowl he replaced the poker, dusting his hands.

He laughed. "I tell you how it is with you, Dominie: our success with these two coons has given you a sort of brain-storm—you think now we can walk away with the whole neighborhood; eh—don't you?" And he eyed me mockingly. Then, with pursed lips, he shook his head. "Nay, nay, Pauline!—nothing doing that way for little Danny!" And, smiling wryly, he fanned his hand at me. "Say, forget it!"

"But the perfect resemblance, Danny," I protested, eagerly, "your face—your voice even—"

"Aw, rats!" he scoffed. "Say, do you know what I think? Well, I think this perfect resemblance is all in a pig's eye—or, rather, in the eyes of these two old negroes! Oh, of course"—with a shrug—"there *is* a resemblance—*some* resemblance; there must be—I believe that. But now, see here," he went on, using the same cautiously subdued tone we had preserved throughout, "you know as well as I do that it's one thing to put it over these fool negroes and quite another to try anything like that on a shrewd lawyer who has been a life-long friend of the family. Pooh!"

He went on. "And anyhow, now what would we gain by being here another day, or another week even? Don't we have the full run of the plant tonight?" Then, as I was silent: "Isn't that enough? Say, what do you want?"

And growling remonstrance, he moved uneasily up and down the room, halting as he passed the door to listen.

What did I want? Three hours ago the answer would have been a crust or two of bread, and a barn to sleep in. Now—

What *did* I want?

With chin upon my hand, I followed Danny with my eyes as he strolled restlessly about the fine old room. Through the square panes of the old-fashioned bookcases I saw tier after tier glutted with sets in fine bindings, their gold embossings still glinting bravely in the firelight. I eyed them frowningly, for of a sudden they brought back with poignant pang the picture of my own little library in the old rectory there in Dorsetshire. My books—my dear, dear books! How I had loved them—and so had *she*—my darling, my angel, my heart's delight! My books! I wondered dully what they had ever done with them—poor things!—after that night when I saw them last and the world slipped from under me and I went down, down—

Books! I roused impatiently. What had *I* to do with books? And yet—

An ejaculation from Danny startled me—brought me to my feet.

Behind me my pal was rummaging in an ancient

escritoire. By the flare of the match in his hand I saw him jerk a package from one of the compartments. Then, as I crossed the floor, a grunt of disappointment escaped him.

"It's nothing," he said; "but I *thought* it was something; these wide, greenish slips looked for all the world like bank-notes—but they're not." His tone was comically rueful. "Near kin, though"—then, answering my question—"why, they're just canceled bank-checks, that's all."

He was going to replace them when I caught his hand.

"Wait," I said; "let's have a look at them."

Danny looked surprised. "What's the idea?"

"Idea?" I grinned. "Why, the idea is, you dub, that if you don't want to see what your name is, I do."

I slapped the dust from the package and stripped it of its rubber band. The sheaf of slips that I ran through my fingers all bore one name—Richard F. Castleman. The checks were for various amounts and seemed almost all for the month of September, a little over a year before. I judged, by rough figuring, that they represented altogether about two thousand dollars.

"Two thousand bucks a month to spend, Danny, eh?" I held the slips before his face. "What do you know about that!"

"Some bones!" And my pal sighed.

He caught the wad of vouchers from me, fingering them curiously.

"They feel familiar," he murmured; "I've handled

thousands of them." His smile was retrospective. "I mean when I was in the bank." He added, dryly, "That's where I learned to study signatures." And I caught a mutter, "One gets in the habit, somehow."

"I suppose so," I commented, carelessly; "they have to be careful."

I lifted one of the little slips from his hand, studying it attentively. The signature was a whirl of tangled flourishing.

"My!" I exclaimed, admiringly, "a penman would have his work cut out to try to make a phony of that, wouldn't he? Look, Danny!" I tried to make a note of wonder subdue the craft of my speech.

My pal did not look at all. Instead, his eye cut me sardonically.

"Think you're pretty foxy, don't you?" he sneered. "Do you think you're the first that's tried that dodge on me? Well, you're not!"

His tone was gruff—bitter with some memory, I guessed. His hand pushed the checks aside.

"It's a dub signature enough, if you want to know," he said. "I could make a phony of it with my eyes shut—that's the way with all those fancy fluke autographs; but"—with a set of jaw—"I'm not going to try." He smiled grimly. "Never again, Dominie; never again."

"But if the game were worth the candle," I whispered.

Danny frowned. The glance he shot me was half angry.

"It's never worth the candle," he answered, sharply; "never, I tell you—the risk is too heavy!"

"But suppose it was a sure thing."

He laughed harshly. "It was a sure thing that got me my three years in San Quentin," he said; "with two more to serve—that is," he amended, coolly, "when they find me!" He eyed the handful of vouchers moodily. "No, no, old man, I don't mind yegging or a con game or even dipping—but no more pen work. Why, I would as soon think of—"

He faltered abruptly, confusedly, but I caught him up.

"Of murder," I said, bitterly. "Go on—say it; you won't hurt my feelings!"

Danny patted my hand. "As if I would try, old man!" reproachfully. "But about that"—his head jerked at the checks in my hand; "you know yourself what they say in stir, 'A free use of the pen leads to a free use of the "pen"'!"

I nodded, remembering the old prison cant. With a sigh I extended the sheaf of little papers.

"Right, lad; put them back. I—"

It was a sentence never finished. On the instant, loudly, imperatively, sounded the annunciator of the telephone upon the table.

Danny jumped, the green slips scattering from his hand to the floor. We looked at the instrument and at each other; then stood as frozen. In my pal's countenance I saw a contraction of alarm—a question; what he saw in mine I do not know. Neither of us spoke.

Again it came—a peal that seemed to fill the air like a shriek.

"We'll have to answer," I whispered, huskily.

Danny glared at me. "Not on your life!" he rasped. In fact, he moved farther away, and I followed. "Just let them ring themselves out."

As though answering the challenge, the bell sounded again — this time in tintinnabulation insistent and prolonged. Indeed, it seemed it would never have done.

But now of a sudden a noise sounded outside the door and it opened to admit Uncle Alex. At sight of us he paused, looking both surprised and taken aback.

"Lawsie, *I* didn't know you-all 'uz in heah! 'Scuse *me*, Mister Dick. De bell keep a-ringin', an' Car'line 'llow you-all must 'a' gone up-stairs. My! how dat bell do ring!"

He shuffled toward the table, looking at Danny uncertainly, for neither of us stirred. My pal, indeed, seemed paralyzed in a mortal funk; and as for myself—well, I dare say I looked no better.

Uncle Alex, with hand above the receiver, hesitated respectfully.

"Does you want me ter answer it, Mister Dick?"

There was nothing for Danny but to nod, though I saw his nervous swallow. Instinctively, it seemed, we both moved so that we were near together.

Uncle Alex, holding the instrument in one hand and the receiver in the other, stood scolding "hellos" into the transmitter.

Abruptly the bell stopped, leaving the "ting" of its vibration dying against the stillness.

"Hel-*lo!*" called Uncle Alex, loudly. His eyes rolled ceilingward.

There was a crackling in the receiver.

The old man's face suddenly lighted in a smile.

"Yes, sir!"—nodding—"yes, sir!"

A shriller crackling lifted, and Uncle Alex chuckled.

"Yes, *sir!*—he sutt'nly is!" Whereupon, the telephone sputtered with excitement, and Uncle Alex's head bobbed energetically. "Yes, sir—all right, sir!—wait *just* a minute!"

He turned about, beaming at Danny.

"It's de Judge, Mister Dick," he said; "he want ter speak to you."

And he extended the instrument.

IX

"YOU ARE NOT THE DICK I KNEW"

UNCLE ALEX spoke again.

"It's de Judge, Mister Dick," he reminded.

But Danny never moved.

Of a sudden I was seized with a strangling spasm of coughing. I lurched to the table, clutching the old negro by the arm.

"Water!" I wheezed.

With a mutter of concern he promptly set down the telephone and shuffled from the room. Instantly I clapped my hand to the transmitter and beckoned Danny savagely.

"Quick!" I snapped at him. "Are you mad? Come talk to him—say something!"

Danny swallowed. "What *can* I say?" And he scowled helplessly.

"Anything! anything!"—frantically—"make a stall!" The receiver lying upon the table broke into a puzzled, questioning cackle. "Quick! Do you want him down here to investigate? *Danny*," I changed, imploringly, and lifted the instrument toward him, "I would do it for you, but you—*you* have the voice." Then, as he seemed to start, "The voice, Danny—the *voice!*"

"By George!" His face changed—lighted with a touch of relief. "I forgot all about the voice," he muttered. A faint smile touched his lips as he crossed the room. "Perhaps—"

He caught the telephone from me.

It was time; for as he did so Uncle Alex stumblingly recrossed the threshold, a half-spilled glass of water dripping in his hand.

"Hello! hello!" Danny called, boldly; and there was a joyous sputter from the instrument. "That you, Judge?—how are you?" The receiver crackled excitedly, and Danny cackled back a faint laugh. "Voice sounds natural, you say?" My pal's eyes sought me, lighting with elation. Uncle Alex, receiving my whispered thanks, slipped from the room with painstaking effort at noiseless self-effacement. "Yes . . . yes," Danny was saying, "I let Alex telephone because I—er—*how's* that?" The telephone had broken in with some laughing interruption. "Didn't want to talk to *you*, you say?"

Sudden illumination and panic filled Danny's face. He looked at me, reddening, his hand tightly cupping the transmitter.

"What's that girl's name?" he whispered.

"Jean." Then, significantly, "You were going up to surprise her later."

He nodded. "I'll tell you, Judge," he cackled into the telephone, "I was afraid Jean might answer the 'phone; and I wanted to slip up there this evening or—er—in the morning—I have a guest, you know—and surprise her. So don't you tell—" The telephone interrupted shrilly, chucklingly. "Oh!

you say she's not there!—oh!" The rogue's pitch dropped disappointedly. He winked at me. "Spending the week-end in the city, eh! . . . No, no, Judge" —with accent of alarm—"don't—*please* don't telephone her! I—I— . . . Yes, *that's* it. I don't want her to know I'm here until I see her—er—in the morning. . . . Yes, met him traveling. . . . No, not Blake, but *Blair*—Doctor Blair. . . . Yes, and he's *so* anxious to meet you, too." Here the scamp leered at me. "What's that, Judge?" His face went blank suddenly. "Oh . . . is *that* so? . . . oh yes, that would be much better!" I could make nothing of my pal's face now; it seemed oddly compounded of consternation and calculation. "No, no—not at all—be delighted . . . all right! . . . 'by!"

He slapped the receiver to its hook and faced me, his eyes shining with excitement.

"*Oh*, ye gods!"

"What—what is it?" eagerly.

"Oh, nothing," said Danny, with unnatural calm —he shrugged—"except—well, he's coming down here, that's all!"

"Danny!"

It was my turn for panic.

"Be here in about three-quarters of an hour."

I dropped weakly into a chair.

"No time for that!" rasped my pal, sharply.

He was peeling the coat from his shoulders.

"Quick!" he snapped, "that lamp—see if you can hold it. If not, light one of those things!" He jerked his head at the candelabra on the mantel.

I stared blankly an instant before I could move

to obey. He had slipped his cuffs from their links and was rolling the sleeve of his right arm to above the elbow. With a grimace of impatience he caught up the lamp and placed it in my hands.

"Listen"—earnestly—"and mind you don't drop that lamp. This duck—this Judge—is coming down here to give us a thousand dollars!—look out!" as I staggered. He went on, hurriedly: "Some fool paid it in to-night in cash—money to take up a mortgage my double holds. The Judge wants to get it into this safe here; he has none and is afraid to keep it; says there are so many tramps around!" Danny grinned.

All the while as I stared he was working his right hand in an exercise like clawing, alternately rubbing and slapping the finger-muscles bunched in the fore-arm. He crossed to the safe, dropping upon his knees.

"Hold the glim, Dominie!"

"Danny," I whispered, apprehensively, "you're not going to crack the gopher!—not *now!*"

His head jerked.

"You're on!" He uttered a short laugh. "But for the first time in my life it's to put something *in.*"

And at last I understood. In order to have the safe under command when the Judge came, it was necessary for him to open it *now* and redissolve the combination.

I began a low-toned question, but his finger-snap snuffed me into instant silence. His head was laid against the steel front of the safe and his fingers clasped the combination-dial. His eyes were closed,

and a little furrow between his brows told me he was listening, listening, as he slowly worked the shining disk before him. I leaned above him, fascinated, thrilled. I was realizing that for which I had so often longed—I was seeing Danny "at work"!

Slowly his fingers circled—now forward, now backward—their motion all but imperceptible; scarcely faster than the dial-hands of a clock. I bent closer, straining to hear what he sought to hear.

Of a sudden it came:

Clin-click!

Danny stirred, and with a great sigh; the tenseness of his face relaxed. He flashed me a smile of triumph, then bent again.

In my excitement I forgot the injunction to silence.

"Can you make it?" I breathed.

"Can I?"—his eye cut at me scornfully—"why, it's a baby's job," he growled. "Like everything else in this plant, it's"—there was suspense as he concentrated again—and again came the "clin-click"—"it's of the vintage of before the war."

I sighed. "So's the wine!"

Danny frowned me to silence.

"I've just to make one more drop of the tumblers," he muttered.

And just then there was a knock—old Alex's knock, fumbling and apologetic.

I started, almost dropping the lamp.

"Come in!" piped Danny, and never so much as looked around. And of a sudden it came to me that there really was no reason why he should. But my pal was ever a quicker thinker than I. As it was,

Uncle Alex merely tiptoed in, made critical estimate of the condition of the fire, and tiptoed out again, silently closing the door.

There was stillness again, broken only by the whispering of the soft-coal fire.

Clin-click!

Danny's arm writhed sharply; I heard a bolt click, and the steel bulkhead swung open. For an instant he peered within, curiously, then he closed the door and reset the combination.

He got to his feet, dusting his knees with one of "Mister Dick's" choicest linen handkerchiefs. He looked at me and laughed.

I was clapping mild applause.

"Punk work, Dominie," he said, with accent of disgust; "I ought to have opened it in half the time."

Then, with coat half on, he paused to listen. But what he heard was only a wagon passing on the turnpike.

"Turn it down some," he directed, as I set the lamp again upon the table. "No, not *too* much; we'll have to let him at least *see* me!" With hands behind him, he paced to the window and back, pausing again before me. "Great heck, Dominie! —suppose we *don't* pull it off?" His dark eyes questioned me solemnly, fearfully. "It's all so crazy, crazy!—it's *impossible* I should look enough like this fellow! I tell you we'll never get away with it!" He half leaned, half perched on the table, glooming into the fire. "And yet," with a jaw-snap, "a thousand bucks—a thousand bucks, Dominie!" He

curved his slow, whimsical smile at me. "When the old duffer sprung that, I guess I kind of lost my head. Say, do you know I forgot all about being scared?"

"Of course, you did," I soothed; "and we'll cop it, lad!"

"If!" Danny shrugged. "It's a big bet, Dominie; just a big bet that I look enough like this fellow to fool this gink for half an hour—just a gamble—see?—a hundred-to-one shot to get a thousand dollars."

"It's worth it, lad."

"Worth it!—well, I guess!" The boy tossed his good-looking head. "It's worth it, and we're going after it! Only"—thoughtfully—"suppose—just *suppose*, Dominie, he fails to recognize me?"

"He won't," Danny"—eagerly; "I've a hunch—"

His fingers snapped. "Let's talk what we *know!*" sharply; "we've got to prepare for every contingency—we must plan. I say suppose it fails to get across—just suppose. What then?"

Brought face to face with the alternative, I thought hard for a minute.

"How is he coming?"

"His car," said Danny.

"Ah!" I eyed him fixedly and smiled. I knew that Danny could drive.

"I get you," said Danny, composedly; "but he may have a chauffeur." Then, as I still looked at him, he nodded. "I get you some more. You mean that the kitchen is comfortable, and a glass of wine—"

He broke off, looking askance at the telephone.

"And, say, there's something else." He stooped under the table a moment; then he emerged, grinning. "I guess that's safe now."

And he was looking pleasantly upward at the portrait above the mantel when we heard a car approaching through the drive. A headlight flashed against the windows.

In an instant Danny was on his feet. He looked excited, splendidly self-assured. He straightened, smilingly.

"Do I look fit, Dominie?"

Did he!—the handsome young daredevil!

"I only wish Jean could see you," I said, slyly.

Danny looked startled.

"I say!" he half gasped, "you don't think there could be any chance of that girl being with him, do you?" Then with relief, "No, no; I'm forgetting —of course not!"

A knock, and Uncle Alex opened the door.

"Heah's de Judge slowin' up," he announced.

Danny whispered hurriedly: "Dominie, that hall lamp on the table — turn it down! It wouldn't hurt"—meaningly—"if you put it out." We moved into the hall.

A moment later Uncle Alex had swung open the front door, and Danny was standing at the threshold —in darkness save for the moonlight that splashed, milk-like, across the broad porch floor. I had done my part.

"Ah, Judge," I heard his voice lift strongly, "this is good—so good of you! By George, the draught has

blown out that lamp! How are you—*how* are you, Judge?"

I heard a pleased laugh—a panting sort of laugh, as of an old man, excited and eager, and saw, silhouetted between me and the moonlight, a tall, fine-looking old gentleman clinging warmly to Danny's hand.

"Dick! Dick! Is it really you—you at last!" The voice shook a little. "You, just when we were giving you—some of us—giving you up for dead!"

Danny laughed lightly. "Perhaps I am dead," he said, in an odd tone, "and this—this is only a phantom."

The Judge's hearty laugh rang through the old hall as he crossed the threshold.

"No phantom ever had grip like that—where on earth did you get it? The Dick I knew used to shake hands like a girl!"

They moved into the library—into the full light that blazed from the fire and the low-turned lamp upon the table. I had withdrawn to the end of the room, waiting the issue of events. From without, Uncle Alex closed the door, leaving us three alone.

I saw the two men look at each other. I saw the visitor start and then step back, staring at Danny with widening eyes.

"Why—why—" he stammered.

"Perhaps," said Danny, coolly, "I am not the Dick you knew!" He stood with hands behind him, eying the other challengingly. In the speech I read a reckless daring—the last bluff of the poker-player with a hand of straw.

But then *that* was the way Danny played poker!

Of a sudden the Judge looked from Danny to the lamp. With a mutter he reached forward and deliberately turned it up. Then, without a word, he moved upon Danny, his tall figure towering, his eyes boring with searching scrutiny as he gripped him by the arms. I moved nearer. answering my pal's almost imperceptible signal.

On the instant the Judge's arms dropped away from Danny and he stepped back with a short laugh.

"You are no more the Dick I knew than I am, myself," he exclaimed. "He was pale—you are brown; he was weak—you are strong; he was sick —you are *well!* No, thank God!"—and his voice lifted—"you are *not* the Dick I knew!"

X

THE JUDGE SPRINGS A SURPRISE

"WELL, Judge, it's a long story," Danny said again.

The visitor collapsed in his chair with a grunt of exasperation. He had emptied himself of questionings and reproaches—but all in vain.

"Upon my word, Dick," he said, disgustedly, "one might think you were one of these returned explorers, afraid to talk lest you violate a contract with some magazine. Here I've asked you twenty simple questions and to not one have you given a satisfactory answer."

The figure leaning upon the mantel shifted uneasily.

"Well, I'll tell you, sir; you see, it's a long—"

"*That* 'll do," said the Judge, with elaborate politeness; "you needn't trouble to say it again. I've learned that much of it. I think I understand, Doctor"—he faced me with a covert wink—"the virgin bloom of our story must be saved for other ears, eh?" He eyed Danny, chucklingly. "All right, young man—that's all right!" He added, grimly, "I'll wait—I'll get it out of *her!*"

From under his brows he leveled a keen, teasing glance at Danny, and my young pal looked at me comically.

"But what's made this thing rather bad, Doctor"—the Judge cleared his throat, sobering abruptly—"is that Dick's odd silence has left us all exposed to the speculations and sensational reports of Harry Chilton—Dick's cousin, you know." His glance cut Danny reproachfully.

I murmured my recognition of the name, and added, with a view to drawing him out:

"Aunt Caroline was telling us that Doctor Chilton had a theory that Dick was dead."

The Judge snorted.

"Theory! It's no theory with Chilton—it's fact!" He fixed his glasses, peering at Danny, quizzically. "Dick, my boy, Chilton's got you dead and buried at the bottom of the Indian Ocean!"

I uttered a shocked cry. "The Indian Ocean! —why, Dick!"

The Judge's white eyebrows lifted delicately. "That's where his cousin declares he is," he said, evenly.

Danny smiled feebly.

"Shipwreck?"

"No, sir!" The old gentleman spoke with complacently grim emphasis. "You died of fever five days out from Aden to Sydney. I beg your pardon, Doctor Blair"—laying his hand upon my knee—"I forgot—I fear I'm making myself disagreeable referring to the matter in this light way. But it all seems so absurd now—and yet, withal, so need-

lessly cruel." He frowned. "Dick, how the—h'm —how on earth do you suppose he ever got such an idea? Look here"—leaning forward—"just tell me this much: did you voyage at all from Aden to Sydney?"

Danny hesitated an instant, then spoke up, glibly: "Oh yes, sir!"

"Well, upon my word!" The Judge looked confounded. "What steamer?—don't tell me it was the *City of Melbourne?*" Then, as Danny nodded, grinning, "It *was?* Well, if that—"

He fell back helplessly.

"But I want to tell you, Judge"—in Danny's eyes a flash of whimsy glinted like an anvil spark— "I positively refuse to consider myself dead—I don't feel the least bit dead."

"Um!" The older man's thin lips compressed themselves. "Well," he answered, gravely, "you didn't look far from it, though, when you left here." Then his countenance warmed with admiration and affection. "Dick, old man"—and he looked him over wonderingly—"do you know somehow I—*I* don't know—I just can't get myself to believe this is you. Someway, I—"

"Judge," I cut in hastily, "did Doctor Chilton mention about what time of the year this was— what date?" I wished to anticipate his putting this question up to Danny.

"Date? Now, let me see"—he frowned up at the ceiling, straining to recall—"why, yes"—and his face cleared—"it was the night of March twenty-third—Easter Sunday, we found, when we looked

it up—and the body was buried at dawn. Oh, Chilton's got it all down fine!" His jaws closed grimly.

My pal and I exchanged a quick glance. On the day in question we had mingled with the crush of the Easter parade on Fifth Avenue, and Danny had cleaned up nearly two hundred dollars.

"By the way, Dick," said the Judge, suddenly, "do you recollect when you wrote him last?"

Danny seemed to search his memory.

"No, I don't, sir," he confessed, with an air of reluctance and apology.

Behind the Judge's back he made me a grimace of impatience, of uneasiness. Now that the money was securely stowed away in the safe I knew that my pal was itching for our visitor to be gone. But this could not be until the Judge's car returned. He had sent his chauffeur back for another package—a very valuable package as he had explained impressively.

I was thinking of this package and wondering what it might contain that was so valuable, when I pricked my ears. The Judge was speaking to Danny of post-cards that Chilton had received from time to time—and some of which he had shown.

"I think the very last one I read was from Cairo. It showed a group of natives in front of Shepheard's Hotel. You wrote that you thought the dry air from the desert had helped your lungs; and you had brushed up acquaintance with one of the officers of the Gippy Camel Corps and he had had you to ride with them."

Then, as Danny nodded, the Judge shifted uneasily, coughing slightly.

"He showed us also a group of dancing-girls—but he did not let me read this." A warm color welled upward to the roots of the old gentleman's white hair, and his eyes dropped at me apologetically. "He seemed to wish me to draw the inference that it—er—well, that it was not fit for us to read; that you were—er—getting—" He coughed, looking vexed.

Danny smiled. "Getting 'somewhere east of Suez,' eh?"

The Judge shook a finger. "Do you know what I said to him, Dick? I looked him straight in the eye and I said: 'I don't know what's in that card, Chilton; but I *do* know one thing—a Castleman is a gentleman and *always* a gentleman, sir, whether he stays in Nashville or goes to the antipodes. I challenge you, sir, to show that card!'"

"Did he?" I asked, as Danny smiled.

"*No*, sir!"—with leonine head-toss—"but he crept away like a whipped puppy, sir!"

Here I remarked ingenuously that I supposed, as Doctor Chilton was Dick's only near relative, the report of the death must have been a great shock to him.

"*Shock*, sir! Why, it was—" He flushed, looking at Danny. "Perhaps, Doctor"—with changed voice—"you would better accept Dick's views about that rather than mine." He added, dryly, "Our opinions about his cousin are not quite in accord."

Then as we were silent he forced himself to go on, though with obvious embarrassment.

"You understand, Doctor, I am speaking now in my capacity as Dick's attorney and business adviser, rather than with any design of pressing the privileges of an old friend. You, as a clergyman" —smiling—"know something of dual relationships."

"Ah, indeed yes!" And I affected a pensive sigh.

There was another pause. He appeared hopeful that Danny might make some comment; but as he did not, the old fellow looked a little confused—I might say, rebuked.

He cleared his throat.

"I owe you an apology, Doctor, for answering your question as I did—and you, too, Dick." He spoke gently, with an indescribable grace of old-fashioned courtesy. "But I could not well have replied otherwise without—well, without saying too much—or too little."

Yet he looked at Danny so wistfully that my pal was constrained to murmur something in reply.

"Eh?—how's that, Dick?" The Judge leaned toward him eagerly. On the instant I caught Danny's eye and passed him a quick nod and shrug. What was it to us—the real Dick's differences with this old man about Chilton!

Danny faced him pleasantly.

"I think, sir," he said, with a smile, "that it is likely you are right, after all, in your estimate. I must acknowledge it looks that way."

His eye touched me, and I nodded approvingly.

The old gentleman's face lighted.

"Do *you* say that? Now, Dick, I call that handsome of you—handsomely said!" He turned to me glowingly. "Ah, Doctor, what a thing the point of view is!—queer thing how the best of us never see things the same way. Let's see, what is it old Horace says—um, I think it is in the Odes, isn't it?

"*Quot capitum vivunt, totidem studiorum Millia.*"

He smiled at me a little superciliously.

I saw Danny grinning quizzically at me over his head, but I answered coolly:

"From the Satires, Judge, I think you'll find—not the Odes. But you remember Terence had the same thought over a hundred years before, and said it much more tersely, too." And I quoted from the second act of "Phormio":

"*Quot homines tot sententiæ; suus curque mos.*"

The old lawyer bowed, in his eyes a sparkle of pleasure.

"Doctor Blair," he said, with simple dignity, "I hope you will permit me to repeat my personal satisfaction over your visit here. I hope, sir"—smiling—"you will stay with us a year and divide yourself impartially between Dick and me. Our near-by city, sir, is known as the Athens of the South, and we have many scholarly men in our community who will vie for the honor of knowing you."

I murmured suitable reply, nursing in my heart grim bitterness.

Would they, indeed! I wondered, scornfully. I

could well imagine how much mere scholarship would suffice with these high-mettled Southerners could they once know me for what I was—a prison-bird—a man without citizenship in any land beneath the sun—a pariah upon whom his own country had branded the indictment of Cain—a human unit with heart and conscience dead.

"And now that you feel that way"—the old fool's voice startled me, but he was speaking to my pal—"I am going to take the liberty of repeating a warning"—he lifted his hand. "Dick, don't ever go away again without making your will!"

"Why, hasn't Dick made a will?" I spoke up involuntarily and without thinking.

"Not to my knowledge, Doctor; and if he had I think I would know; unless, Dick, you made the holographic will we talked about. Did you?"

I intervened hastily.

"What is a holographic will?" I asked, for Danny's eyes had sought me quizzically.

A holographic will, the Judge explained, was one written wholly in the handwriting of the person making it and need not even be witnessed.

"In Tennessee such a will is still perfectly legal," he went on, "and I recommended Dick to write out something of this kind—if he did no more—and leave it with me or among his papers. I even dictated him a form one night before he left and he wrote it down right at this table . . . let me see—I think in that green-morocco note-book of yours, wasn't it, Dick? You told *me* you were going to make a draft and leave it in the safe there." He

looked off, smilingly pulling at his mustache. "And I remember you almost quarreled with me because I said that in that case, if I were you, I wouldn't leave the combination with Harry Chilton—ah, do you remember that, Dick?"

My young pal nodded, looking a little sullen and tired.

"I remember, sir," he said, looking down.

The Judge laughed. "To be wholly frank, Doctor," he said, "I didn't urge him about the will as much as I would have done if the one beneficiary he had in his mind had been anybody but my own niece."

So that was the way the cat jumped! I looked at the safe, pondering.

He followed my glance.

"Look here, Dick," he said, dropping his voice, "I wouldn't keep that money long in this house, if I were you."

My pal's lips smoothed a grin.

"All right, Judge," he said, "I promise you I won't!"

"Because, you see, there are so many tramps about," went on the other; "the turnpikes and railroad lines are full of them at this season moving southward. You know, Doctor Blair, the highway through here is a good deal like your 'Great North Road' in England; we are right here in the great migratory track between North and South — the Great Lakes and the Gulf. Tramps are as regular in spring and fall as the robins and swallows."

"Indeed?" I cooed, politely. I wondered what he would say if he knew he was entertaining two.

"Yes, sir; the cities drive them onward and they are a plague to us here in the country—at least along an important turnpike like that. Why, only this afternoon one of my hands, driving a corn-load, met two perfectly villainous-looking scamps—one old and one young, he said. They asked their way, and he purposely misdirected them, as they were coming this way."

"Very ingenious," I commented, dryly.

I tried to get Danny's eye, but for variation he had started in punching the fire.

"Well, you see, all my people have been cautioned about looking after this place," continued the Judge; "it's been rather unprotected with only the negroes here—and there's really quite a good deal of silver and family heirlooms and one thing and another of more or less intrinsic value. And then Dick has rather invited molestation, in my opinion, by his conduct about his mother's jewels."

The poker in my pal's hand suddenly rested.

"Just think"—the Judge's voice dropped as he leaned toward me—"of a fellow so reckless as to keep jewels valued at thousands in an old coal-box like that"—he jerked his head in the direction of the safe—"just for a sentimental notion that this is the home of the things and they would be lonesome in a safe-deposit vault. Jewels lonesome! What do you think of that?"

I thought, of course, that it was preposterously silly, and said so. What I did not say, however, was that I was exceedingly glad because of the young man's folly.

"And so Dick's mother's jewels are in that safe!"

"Oh no!—not *now!*" He shook his head with pursed lips, and my elation dropped heavily. "No, I did persuade him to let me put them in the bank to stay during his absence. I suppose, Dick, I'll have to bring them back now; I believe I promised that I would the day you returned. That is hardly possible; but, if you say the word, I'll do so to-morrow. Shall I?"

"If you please, Judge!" Danny dug into a tiny volcano of coal, then looked around brazenly. "I only wish, for Doctor Blair's sake, that they were here to-night"—here he dug again; "the Doctor is rather interested in jewels and—er—coins."

The Judge nodded interestedly. "A collector, Doctor?"

I murmured something which he never heard, for of a sudden he was on his feet, listening.

"Is that something coming through the drive?" A moment, and he shook his head. "Can't imagine what's the matter with Sam," he muttered; "I'm afraid he isn't finding what I sent him for." He looked toward the door. "If you'll excuse me I'll take a look out front and see if there's any sign of him."

With the door closed between us, I slipped to Danny's side. I stood close to his ear, speaking rapidly.

A lift of his hand and a scowl checked me.

"Not on your life!—*no*, sir!" He all but snarled it at me. "I wouldn't stay over here another day and face that fellow Chilton for — Hell! you're

crazy!" He slammed the steel poker at the grate-bars with such force that it rang.

"But the jewels, Danny!—the jewels!" I pleaded, hoarsely, agonizingly; "they're our meat"—fiercely; "he says they're worth thousands!"

"I don't care"—through his teeth—"if they're worth millions! Now, see here, Dominie, old man" —his free hand caught my wrist, his eyes blazing through slits—"we don't want to quarrel, you and I—we *can't*"—gently—"but not another word about that—understand?—neither now nor after he goes!" He jerked his thumb at the porch. "Look here, now"—angrily—"that goes! Don't nag me any more about staying over here!"

His voice and eyes softened.

"*Please* don't, Dominie! Why, man," and his laugh was short and hard, "there's nothing above hell or under heaven that could tempt me to stay over here another twenty-four hours and risk meeting this Chilton. I'm afraid of him: *he knows something!*"

He moved back from me sharply, warningly, and I slipped back to my seat. From afar had come the honk of an automobile-horn, differentiated by a succession of sharp, staccato blasts. It sounded again, louder now, accompanying the nearing vibration of a car.

The Judge burst in, all afire with odd excitement.

"He's coming!" he exclaimed. "And that was the signal: she's *with* him, Dick!"

The long poker fell from my young pal's grasp and struck clatteringly across the fender.

His face reddened, then paled.

"She?" he gasped, falling back. "Who—what she?"

"Why, Jean, you sinner!" roared the Judge. "Sam's been to the city and back! Didn't you suspect?—*she* was the package—the valuable package for which I sent!"

XI

WHAT CAME TO DANNY

DANNY looked at me, then at the Judge, and his eyes held consternation.

"You don't mean—*do* you mean she's coming here?" he faltered.

The Judge's laugh was gleeful as a boy's.

"She *is* here!"

A light flashed like the sun into the windows and was gone; a padding roar waxed to fierce crescendo and was still, leaving only the rhythmic sound of an engine panting like a winded steed without.

Uncle Alex stuck his head in unceremoniously.

"Heah's de cah!" he exclaimed, breathlessly; "an' I t'ink dat Miss Jean—"

"Coming," laughed the old Judge. "Doctor," with a tug at my sleeve, "come on—we'll leave Dick the field!"

But Danny took a stride after us.

"No, sir!—no, Dick!"—the Judge waved him back—"you are to stay right here, sir!" Then in an excited whisper, "It's to be a complete surprise; she doesn't know a thing!"

And he dragged me across the threshold, shutting the door upon Danny.

As it closed I had a last glimpse of my pal, halted irresolutely in the middle of the floor, his dark eyes upon me in a glare of panic, his lips writhing at me some pantomime of question or appeal—which, I could not tell. But it came to me dully that it could not matter now: we could not lift a hand. We had been sitting here napping, complacent in what we fancied was anchored security, yet all the while—drifting. Now the rapids had us, and for the moment the current must have its way.

The Judge was whispering to Uncle Alex.

"And then show her into the library," I heard; "and if you give it away I'll kill you, you black rascal!"

He drew me to where we were screened by the opened door.

Uncle Alex, grinning delightedly, and holding high the light, passed out across the threshold. Above the noisy pulsing of the engine I heard a light step upon the porch, and a girl's voice of mellow sweetness raised in greeting.

Then came a question—eager, holding a little flutter of excitement.

"Sam said Uncle sent for me—that there was a gentleman here with news; some one who—who had met—"

She faltered with a panting laugh.

"Yes, Missy; yes'm, dey is"—Uncle Alex's tones were smooth as oil—"it's Doctor Blair—he's a preacher f'om 'way 'cross de big waters. Yes'm, he's brung de bes' kind er news; an' right heah in de lib'ary wid de Judge."

And his hand opened the door for her.

Then it closed.

In the silence the Judge nudged me, but I did not respond. I stood there, stiffened, holding my breath in a suspense of agony. For I knew it was the acid test the counterfeit confronted now: a woman who had loved and been loved—the dead man's sweetheart with the sensate memory of her lover's kiss.

Through the panels came a cry that was a scream; a rushing sound, then laughter and a sob.

"Dick!—oh, Dick!"

And then a long-drawn, nestling sigh.

The old Judge looked at me, blowing his nose.

"Ah, Doctor, what a thing it is to be young!" Then, with fine assumption of indignation, he turned upon Uncle Alex, who was blinking mistily. "Here! here! you old mummy, what are *you* sniveling about?"

Yet with the words his arm fell tenderly across the old servitor's shoulders.

"Doctor," looking at me, "he and I—we've trotted them both on our feet as babies, 'Here we go to Baltimore!' haven't we, old friend, eh?" And the Judge cleared his throat, blowing his nose again.

"I wonder, Alex"—with sudden beaming—"I wonder if there isn't a bottle or two of the old Madeira left, eh; old mahogany?"

"Jus' two bottles, Judge," smilingly.

"One will be enough, sir; but the occasion is worthy of it." He turned to me as Uncle Alex shuffled toward the dining-room. "Come along,

Doctor; we'll leave those two together awhile and go drink their healths."

I moved slowly past the door of the library, my ears pricked to hear what was transpiring within. For a moment the girl's voice penetrated to me, but I could distinguish no words; only a low, tender minor like the love-coo of a mother above a child.

But I heard no sound from my pal.

"Come, Doctor!" the Judge called.

I sighed, moving on.

Poor Danny!

And again he was silent when later, long after, we stood together at the edge of the porch and watched the receding car dissolve into the arms of the night. Far away up the pike a red point hung for an instant, gleaming like a ruby star.

Then it was gone.

A moment, and a horn sounded, faint and far—two double blasts that seemed to say "good night! good-by!"

I turned to Danny with a smirk of triumph.

"Well, Danny lad, was there ever such a cinch in all the world?" My whisper sounded hoarse under my excitement. "Say, was there, now?"

He did not answer, did not seem to hear. He just stood there in the white glare of the Southern moon, his hand laid high against one of the big fluted columns, his face still turned to where the car had vanished.

But I went on in my elation:

"Yes, sir, it's just been a walk-over—a walk-over from start to finish!" I smoothed my hands, ex-

ulting. "Why, we've tricked them all, fooled everything in sight—except"—my hand smothered a chuckle—"except the dog."

"Aye, except the dog," he muttered low.

I waited, but he did not stir. I peered warily behind us into the hall, but the house was wrapped in silence; there was not a soul astir except ourselves. It was late, I knew; and we would have to get busy if we were going to get through and on our way before the morning caught our heels.

Morning! I looked at my pal rebelliously, recalling the Judge's last words, "Now, I'll go into the city in the morning, Dick, and get the jewels." And thinking of it, I took courage by the forelock to try again.

"Danny," I said, softly. Then, as his head stirred the slightest: "Do you know I believe"—craftily—"that if we had stayed over another day we could even have got past Chilton all right. Of course"—hastily—"I know we're not going—"

"Chilton!" He blurted the name with something of careless contempt, and without turning. "Oh, I don't think we'll have any trouble with Chilton!"

My pulse leaped, but I was afraid to show my glee. Better to take his change of mind as a matter of course.

"It's worth the risk, Danny lad."

"*Worth* it!" The ejaculation was impulsive—its emphasis eloquent with conviction beyond the power of words, though the smile that the moonlight chiseled was oddly dreamy—far away. "It's worth it a thousand—aye, ten thousand times."

I was delighted, though it was small wonder to me that our success had emboldened him so. If now his courage would only maintain to the sticking-point.

"After all, it's just for a day," I reminded, discreetly.

He looked at me quickly.

"I know"—he nodded slowly, and his chest lifted in a sigh—"just for a day!"

His face shadowed, and for the instant I had a sinking fear that he was getting cold feet again.

I drew closer, gripping his arm.

I whispered: "But after to-morrow there will never be another chance!"—I spoke earnestly, warningly—"never again, Danny—never again!"

"Don't I know!" he muttered, shifting from my grasp; "you don't need to tell me."

He shouldered the pillar almost sullenly, his hands in his pockets, his gaze uplifted and ranging far off above the top of the old magnolia where we had crouched such a little while before.

"Dominie," he said, abruptly, "did you happen to notice her hand here in the moonlight?"

I bobbed my head.

"Aye, lad, didn't I!" eagerly. For I had not only noticed the rings, but the solitaire at her throat. "And the neck, Danny; it's pretty enough, isn't it?—without jewels, eh?" I chuckled, thinking how easily his skill would enable him to add the pendant to our luck.

He muttered something—I don't know what—and his eyes were like the stars.

XII

WHAT THE SAFE HELD

IN the library we gloated over the treasure that the Judge had brought; or rather I did while my pal rummaged farther in the iron safe.

I was counting the money when his exclamation startled me. I looked up to see him staring at an open sheet of paper. As he read he laid in my hand mechanically a long, blue envelope. The flap was open and quite entire, betraying signs of having been but lightly sealed. I turned it over.

Across one end ran an inscription: "Last will and testament of Richard Fentress Castleman."

I whistled as we looked at each other.

He nodded gravely. "You see? He did remember her." And he extended me the paper.

It was dated "Winnicrest," nearly a year before, and was a will, all right, very brief—covering not quite a page of rather thin paper, but very comprehensive and clear. There were some minor bequests, including provision for the old servants and the gift of the "Alloya Apartment Building" and ten thousand dollars in street-railway and telephone stocks to "my beloved cousin, Harry M. Chilton."

Otherwise the estate entire was left without reservation to Jean Allen Logan, her heirs and assignees for ever.

The document was not witnessed, but a single concluding clause declared it to be in the handwriting of the testator. Unquestionably this was a "holographic" will, the kind of which the Judge had spoken. It was equally certain that it was a will of whose existence he had no knowledge. I wondered if any one else had knowledge of it.

I had moved a distance away from Danny to get a better light from the table lamp; and as I stood with my back to him, my eyes lifted thoughtfully to the grate where a little mountain-peak of coal was sending out a long, sputtering geyser of flame. And now as I looked, my fingers—serving some subconscious thought—began to smooth the flimsy sheet into folds, creasing the whole gradually into a long narrow strip.

I stood there, my eyes on the whispering flame —thinking.

No, the Judge knew nothing about it; and the girl—it wasn't likely that the girl knew anything about it, either.

No one knew about it but ourselves; that seemed reasonably certain—sure, in fact. Obviously not even the dead man's cousin knew anything about it.

Behind me the silence was punctured by a low laugh from Danny.

"Funny, isn't it?" his voice came musingly. "Think of our finding this—before any one else!"

In the grate the peak with the flame-jet toppled

and fell, leaving a red, glowing crater—a fiery mouth that yawned at me with wide-distended jaws—eager, inviting.

Danny laughed again. "We, of all people," he said.

I nodded. "Aye"—mechanically—"of all people!"

I drifted nearer the hearth-rug, my fingers doubling and redoubling the long strip they held, shaping the outline of a little square pellet. It came to me oddly that it was the very kind we used to mold on examination days when I was a sixth-form boy at school. How easy it had been to place them where we would, right under the eyes of the masters! And yet, I remembered, there were examinations where they were never circulated at all—the times when they placed us "on our honor." I could have laughed now with the memory of it, but that something gripped me with a curious, poignant pain.

Danny's voice brought me back. "Queer, isn't it?"—and I saw he was still upon his theme; "but then everything's queer, for that matter—life's queer"—musingly—"uncertain as a game of chance."

"Just about."

I spoke dryly; for in my time I had seen many a game of "chance" in which there was no element of uncertainty. Yes, life was such a game—the boy spoke truer than he knew. It was a "game of chance" in which the cards were marked and stacked against him; a game in which there was nothing of chance unless he made it for himself or—

Or unless I made it for him!

My fingers tightened upon the pellet and I sidled still nearer the grate and its crimson pocket. On the instant Danny spoke again.

"I'm thinking, Dominie, that it's rather like a game of cards *now*." His tone was whimsical, and, without turning, I perked my head inquiringly. "Three to play—you and I and the poor beggar who made the will. A game with two crooks sitting in, eh?" He laughed softly, almost behind my shoulder.

"Well?" I frowned; impatient for him to move away.

"Oh, nothing," lightly. I heard him rummaging now about the table at my back; "only I was thinking he would be surprised to know that even crooks" —his voice rested a second while his arm groped in the back of the drawer—"even crooks can give a square deal—"

I waited, scowling.

—"to the dead." His voice dropped away absently. He closed the drawer with a grunt of disappointment. "Now, where in Sam Hill—Ah!" He stooped suddenly, pouncing triumphantly upon a tube of paste that had fallen under the table. "There's what I'm looking for. I knew I had seen—" The mutter changed to a cheerful whistling as he crossed back to the corner where stood the safe.

And I was left before the grate alone. It was what I had waited for, but now I just stood there glooming across at the fire's red heart netted with its lambent web of violet flame. But never an inch did I move across the space that lay between.

"Yet why?" I questioned, fiercely, of myself. "Why?" And I could not tell.

But a choke of anger swelled in my throat; anger with my pal for his unwitting interference, greater anger for the strange inhibition that of a sudden had gripped my will in thrall, so that what I would do, that I could not do at all.

And presently, as I stood there, my fingers began working with the little square of paper, slowly opening it till it lay in my hand, folded only as it had been when I took it from the envelope and with the little checker-board creasings I had made. I fingered it thoughtfully, my glance scowling upward, touching by accident the portrait of the soldier grandfather. The dark eyes were full upon me, sensate—so it seemed to my fancy—with an uncanny understanding and—and was it something else? I turned short about and with extended arm:

"This"—gruffly—"what do you want to do with it?"

My pal's whistling stopped.

"Do?" He came toward me, the blue envelope in his hand. "Why, I'm going to seal it again in this!" And then I saw that he had gummed the flap again.

I looked beyond him at the safe.

"You mean to put it back?" harshly.

"What else?" His eyes fixed me with surprise. "Why, Dominie, this means everything in the world —to her."

He took the paper, sealing it in the envelope, while I eyed him moodily.

"Is it so important?" I smiled, craftily, nodding at the will. "I mean now, with 'Dick' back."

Danny's laugh was dry.

"You're a great pipe-dreamer, Dominie, aren't you?" Yet he sighed.

Then without more argument he walked straight to the safe and placed the will therein.

He lingered a moment upon his knee, looking at the closed door.

"There you are, Mr. Castleman," he muttered; "you see I've put it back again!" In the silence the bolts clicked. "And I'll set the combination, Dominie, just as the poor chap left it."

I grunted at his sentiment. Yet a moment later I had to acknowledge my young pal's practical side in locking up our money-haul in the old desk instead of in the safe.

"Easier to grab if we have to make a sudden get-away," was the way he put it. Moreover, while the desk was ancient enough, the lock upon it was modern and quite new. My pal examined the slim key with satisfaction.

"And to-morrow," I said, thinking of the jewels—to-morrow old Opportunity will knock once again! to-morrow you'll—"

His hand, upraised, checked me.

"Listen!"

Somewhere within the hall's depths an ancient clock was groaning out the hour. It seemed like it would never have done, but when it was Danny smiled.

"To-day, Dominie!"

"Why, yes!" I said, surprised; "it is a new day."

"A new day, Dominie!" He straightened above me, his hands laid upon my shoulders, his study of me curiously wistful. "I'm thinking it may be that. Of what are you thinking?"

Just at the instant I was in the throes of a long-drawn yawn. I laughed, coming out of it.

"I'm thinking," I said, "that we'd better get to bed."

Outside in the great, ghostly hall the bedroom candle that Danny lighted gleamed like a tiny star. I busied myself locking the big front door.

"Quite right! quite right!" approved my young pal with an air; "one can never be too careful!" He drew toward me, inclining whisperingly. "You know," with mockery of fearsomeness, "the Judge warned us there were *tramps* about!"

XIII

A BELL IN THE NIGHT

A BELL ringing somewhere!

A bell that was part of my dream, I knew—an old-fashioned bell pendent from a spring and that had hung in the back of the rectory—there away beyond the sea in Dorsetshire—for years and years and years.

A bell wildly ringing in the dead of night—a bell, so I dreamed, and then a knocking. After that, shadowy forms before me with a burden, as I stood there in the rectory door with lamp erected high. "Aye, he did it!" they were fiercely telling me. "Meg Percy saw him when he struck her down—'twas in his drink again!"

Yes, a bell's frightened clamor that quavered away into questioning silence, only to peal more madly still again. Yes, I always heard it when I dreamed of her! A bell, and a knocking that boomed without a door—

"Dominie!" and then the low tone called again. "Eh?"

I started up, eyes wide opened in the glamorous light that bathed the bedroom from the dying fire.

"Listen!" Danny breathed, as he clutched my arm.

Stillness, then a distant jangle of loose wire and a bell's mad pealing in the night. Then it died away, beat by beat—slowly, reluctantly.

He whispered. "What do you suppose it is?"

I made no answer, for the question called for none. I was wide awake now and clambered out of bed.

"Shall we dress?" I questioned him, in panic.

He nodded. "Yes," then, quickly, "no, not yet —wait!" and his hand lifted.

Far away in the house a door whined; then there sounded the scrape of shuffling feet and a mutter not unlike the growl of an awakened dog.

"He's answering," said my pal. "Here, slip this on." And he held another blanket robe.

Noiselessly he drew the door open and we stood there, half ventured into the hall—listening.

Again the bell and the brass knocker's booming upon the door. I jerked, for behind it was a hand imperative—masterful with authority.

"Alex—Uncle Alex!" a man's voice shouted.

"I'm a-comin'!" Uncle Alex's plaint lifted nervously. "Gimme time, can't you?" He was working at bolt and lock.

A knob rattled and we heard the door swing open.

"Lawsie mercy!" There was confusion—amazement in Uncle Alex's exclamation. "La! I didn't know—"

"Never mind!" The voice was in the hall now; a heavy tread sounded. "I expected to get home in the evening, but missed connection at Louisville."

The speaker seemed to pass into the library—we heard the crackle of a match. Then came a colloquy that we could not get; after which the old negro's feet shuffled in the hall again.

"And put a light in my room," the visitor called.

His room!

"Yes, sir." The stairs began to crack under Uncle Alex's labored tread.

Danny's hand drew me back within the room. Very gently he closed the door.

We stood waiting.

Presently a hand scraped the panels without, then fumbled with the knob. Without so much as pretense at knocking the old servant opened the door —then closed it behind his back.

In the dull red light his eyes gleamed agate-like —fiery as living coals.

"Well?"

My pal's tone was short—recklessly defiant. So I had heard him speak before when once in fun I had come behind him in the street and laid my hand upon his shoulder.

The old man's face darkened.

"I reckon you might know who 'tis," he said, gruffly. "You heerd him?"

Danny answered nothing.

"Why, it Doctor Chilton, Mister Dick!" grumblingly. "La! anybody might know dey ain't nobody come bossin' roun' dis house in de middle er de night dat way 'cept him. He been on a trip up Norf somew'r's an' he jus' come down on dat two-o'clock train. He make 'um let him off at Gallatin."

Danny answered the quick pressure of my foot.

"Did you tell him I'm—that I've—"

"No, *sir!*" in quick protest. "Huh! T'ink I gwine ter have him wakin' you-all up? But Car'line knowed dat bell'd do it." This gloomily.

There was a question pricking me.

"Where does he sleep?" I questioned.

Uncle Alex's grunt was hog-like. "In ole Miss's room 'cross de hall dere whenever he stays out heah. He gettin' so he t'ink it his room, Mister Dick," aggrievedly. "Car'line she tol' me not to tell you 'bout dat, but—"

Danny checked him. "Never mind—that's all right! What's he doing now?"

"Writin' in de lib'ary." Then Uncle Alex sniggered. "He ax me how come dey been a fire dere; an' I tell him de Judge an' Miss Jean 'uz heah awhile. An', oh yes, he guv me a note ter sen' over by Jeff fus' t'ing in de mornin'. It fer de Judge an' he say it mighty important." Here Uncle Alex gurgled, his eyes cutting Danny slyly. "It sump'n 'bout you, I 'speck, 'cause he say he know now you sutt'ny is dead."

"Oh!" Very coolly my pal took the envelope from his hand. "I'm afraid, then, it won't do to send it," and he looked with questioning at me. "I think, Doctor, it would only needlessly shock the Judge and Jean."

And both I and Uncle Alex nodded acquiescence.

And then Danny solicitously sent him off to bed.

"Yes, sir; I'm goin' plum straight soon's I light de lamp in dere." And he left us, lifting his feet noiselessly this time as he moved across the hall.

It was I who broke open the envelope and was the first to stare at the lines I found within:

Have just returned from Detroit, where I went on advice of cablegram to see Dr. Carleton Drummond, of London, who is attending International Bible Conference. Worst fears about poor Dick fully realized. Drummond was with him on board *City of Melbourne* when he died. Saw his body lowered into the sea. Break the news to Jean.

So much I mumbled aloud, stooping to the fire's red glow. Then Danny caught the paper from my twitching hand.

"Dead! really dead!" he muttered over it with feeling. "Poor devil! Poor old chap!" He looked at me distressfully. "Say, maybe it's a mistake, eh? Who is this London guy, anyway? Ever hear of him?"

Had I!

It was mine to explain with bitterness that Dr. Carleton Drummond, with a world-wide reputation for accuracy as the foremost English Orientalist of his day, was not one to make mistakes.

"It goes—whatever he says," I told him, sullenly; "you can put that in your pipe and smoke it!" I added, with gloom, "And you can bet your life the gink down-stairs has got his facts—you needn't worry about *that!*"

And I imparted hurriedly what the Judge had told me as we sat over the bottle of old Madeira: How Doctor Chilton had been neglecting his practice for months to establish for certainty his cousin's fate.

"He's done it," I finished, grimly; "I'll bet he

could lag us with a word!" Then, as he swallowed, "What 'll we do?"

"Beat it!" hoarsely.

In the moments that followed we moved swiftly, but as silently as the shadows that accompanied on walls and floor and ceiling. With curtains drawn and the door masked at every interstice that might reveal the firelight, we tore madly through our dressing. 'Twas Danny that was busiest, what with helping me and ever and anon listening at the door.

The last time he raised his hand.

"'Sh-h!" he hissed warning.

Some one was coming up; some one of heavy tread by the complaining of the old stairway. A foot struck against the landing's edge; then we heard a heavy breathing pause outside the door. It sounded as though the person were considering whether he would enter here. Then the feet passed on.

We heard a door close.

"Whew!" and Danny affected limpness. "Say, do you know what I did?" In his face shaped an odd—a sickly, sheepish grin. "I forgot to lock the door!" he said.

XIV

WHAT THE PORTRAIT SHOWED ME

"CAREFUL, you fool!"

For with the startled whine of the door's hinge my heart had leaped astray in panic.

My pal looked backward with a leer.

"You afraid of *that?*" in hoarsely muttered scorn. The shoes he dangled swung at the wall of darkness that vibrated with the sleeper's snores. "Why, you couldn't wake that bloater with a stick of dynamite! I know the kind," with light contempt.

And with but indifferent care he closed the door behind us and led the way down-stairs.

Once in the library and the portal shut, we spoke freely, but in tones subdued. We would wait an hour, said Danny, then catch the first Interburban in. The Judge had told me that it passed this point at five. And, as Danny said, we would be safe enough in lingering. The house was silent as a tomb.

My lad coolly lighted a candelabrum and set it on the table. The shades and curtains were already drawn.

"The pill-pusher's work, I guess," and my pal nodded at them. "I could swear they weren't that way when we two went up-stairs."

It was of no matter, I thought, but there were other things that were.

"The money, Danny," I began, my eyes skirting around at the old desk against the wall.

"I know." Yet he seemed to hesitate, I thought.

"We'll need it!" I said, grimly. "Have you the key?"

Danny's hand sought his pocket slowly. Then without withdrawing it he stood looking at me oddly.

"Look here, old man. Do you know—I mean," he stammered, "have you thought whose this money is—whose *now?*" And he led my glance toward the iron safe.

I merely grunted, eying him askance. There were times when it was hard to separate my young pal's waggery from a vagrant touch of earnestness.

"It's hers, Dominie"—and he brought out the key, fingering it soberly; "we're robbing a girl. That's right!" His brows lifted with a smile. And I saw it was no waggery at all.

I scowled at him.

"You make me tired!"

Then, as he was silent, I jeered at him for letting sentimental sympathy for a pretty face soften him into a fool.

"What do you want to do—put the stuff back in the safe with the will? Would you like to?" in pleasant mockery.

And with disgust I noted in his face that he would be willing to do that very thing.

"Lad! lad!" I groaned. I spread my hands, indicating our helplessness—our need.

"Dominie!" and without another word he walked to the desk, opened it, and tossed me out the bundle of yellowbacks.

I clutched it with relief. 'Tis only poverty that knows the comfort of money that falls within the lap.

Danny smiled at me. "I'm going back now," he said, "and rustle some wine and a bite of chuck for you. You're dead, I know—or nearly."

In truth I was indeed.

With his hand on the knob he looked down, and then around at me.

"Dominie," he whispered across the room, "what do you think? I mean about this—you know, this news. Will it break her heart, you think?"

I did not turn lest the boy would see me smile at him.

"Maybe!" and I shrugged. "Women's hearts break every day—women just as fair, just as dainty —women just as sweet as she!"

"I know," gently. Then, more softly, "Poor Dominie!" and I heard the door click.

I looked around to find him gone.

Then in that state of utter weariness that has in it yet a drugged peace, I just sat there buried in the deep chair beneath the candles—thinking. Memories came out of the shadows of the dimly lumined old room—ghosts of happier days; but I laid them with a frown. There was enough in the present to engage thought; enough in the strange, inexplicable sequence of good and ill fortune that had come our way since we traveled the road of yesterday.

Yesterday? I smiled incredulously; was it only such a little while? Yes, counting this as another day, it was only yesterday that we were two wanderers, Danny and I—aye, two vagabonds; homeless, without a place to lay our heads. Yesterday, dragging hopelessly along a weary way, cursing the dust that Prosperity scattered contemptuously upon our wretched rags; and then by a miracle lifted into comfort—the affluence of a night. Here by this fire I had touched refinement and clean living—had been once more an object of consideration—of esteem, even, I felt; and Danny—

Danny, for the magic evening, rich, respected; going to marry the belle of this wonderland into which our wayworn feet had strayed!

Why, it had been like one of the fairy tales that had held captive my early imaginings; had filled my boyish soul with rapture.

Yes, it had been a fairy spell—no more!

For now the hour had struck—the witchery was o'er. Perhaps even this remnant that remained would slip from me through the meshes of a dream, and with morning I should wake beside some dew-chilled stack of straw and stretch my stiffened limbs in Cinderella rags. "Winnicrest" and its cheer would fade as a fantasy of the night; its kindly ministering servants would be gone, never to return; and gone, too, would be the Judge and Jean and Chilton. Thereafter, they would only be memory pictures.

No, Chilton would not even be that; for Chilton I had not seen. Of him I had no image.

Chilton! Somehow I began to wonder what the man looked like. Was Chilton like Dick—and therefore like Danny?

If so, he would be like the portrait up there of the soldier grandfather.

Moved by sudden, curious impulse, I got to my feet, lifting high the candelabrum before the full-length canvas above the mantel-shelf.

Then it came to me that, after all, the face need not resemble Chilton, his lineage being upon Dick's mother's side. Therefore I was about to set down the light when I was moved to study the portrait more curiously.

Now, there is a winning, mystic witchery about candle-light that invests it with a power no other artificial light may share. Like moonlight, it has a spiritual intimacy with all upon which it falls, enabling it to allure into the open shy, elusive elements of beauty that grosser lights can never even find. Moonlight for old ruins; candle-light for old mahogany and silver, for tapestries and cheval-mirrors, for portraits. To these last it can give more than beauty—it can almost give a soul.

So now, with some thought of this, I held high aloft the branching candlestick before the long portrait in gray regimentals. And as I did the figure seemed to move out from the canvas and stand poised as though half-minded to step down from out its frame of tarnished gold. The eyes were upon me, fixed with that grave, personal regard that is the cunning trick of portraiture—a feature often so realistic as to be disconcerting. Some sense

of this I felt now, and the impression was enhanced by the fact that in the wavering candle-glare the eyes seemed quivering with sensate life. I moved the light, and as I did the firm lips seemed to answer the motion as though they fain would speak to me.

Indulging my mood, I slipped forward, the light erected high above me. Whereupon the illusion wavered in strength—was gone; the figure became but a thing of shred and pigment. I moved backward through a yard, and once more the figure's spirit seemed to come, the hand upon the sword-hilt to take a firmer grasp, the eyes to glow at me with meaning.

And yet—*were* the eyes looking at me now? Yes, but—

No, they were looking down!

I peered closer, interested, fascinated; amused with what I knew was, after all, but a tired playing with subjective elements within myself. Yet as I looked, the dark lashes seemed to lift again, the eyes to hold me with a gaze impelling, significant. Then, even as I blinked they were directed down again. Down at what?

It was my whim to wonder. There was the crystal-white mantel with its ancient silver candlestick, the mate to the one I held; and there was a glass globe that embraced some faded artificial flowers. Below this the fireplace and its fender of gleaming brass—no more.

Yet once again, as I lifted my gaze to the portrait, the eyes met me full, then instantly dropped as though trying to lead my glance to something below.

It was odd—provocative.

"*What* is it?" I muttered, vexedly.

Involuntarily I drifted across the rug, my eyes sweeping the hearth, the fender, and even the shadowed recess of the grate where lay the shrunken, dying fire, already being vested with an ashen shroud of gray. And yet it was not all gray I noticed, for against the pale cerement lay a trapping of black—a long, crêpe-like filament of paper-ash to which yet clung a white figment with little square creasings such as might have been made by a folding and refolding many times between the fingers.

Beside it a splash of color that was oddly reminiscent, the unconsumed corner of what had been an envelope of blue.

Stillness, and then a cry—my own—though then I did not know. Next Danny with his grip about me—his anxious questionings—words that died upon his lips as I looked at him—then pointed, holding the dripping candles low.

After that, the deluge, a tempest pour of wrath I'd never seen in him before!

"Danny lad, listen!" pleadingly.

He flung his hand up as he strode the floor.

"It's no use, Dominie," he uttered, in a choking wrath; "I tell you we'll *stay!* I'd stay now and expose that fellow even if they—if I have to—"

"Go to jail!" I finished for him, grimly. "Well, you'll do it, all right. They'll box you sure!"

Then I bethought me to find arguments in his terror of San Quentin.

"It 'll lead back to the jungle, lad, for you!"

He wheeled upon me, eyes ablaze.

"All right!"—through his teeth—"I'll risk it—even that!"

"For a girl!" I jeered.

"For her!" and his eyes defied.

I shrugged helplessly.

He scowled down at the charred paper scraps half clenched within his hand, then at the iron safe in its distant shadowy corner.

"The cur! the coward!" his throat stormed hoarsely. "Thief!" and how his eyes blazed as he spit the word!

I eyed him in gloomy silence. For it was useless to say more in the face of the temper that was driving him amain upon this mistaken knight's service; this mad, Quixotic intent upon a sacrifice of himself to save the interests of this girl who had so pinned his errant fancy.

By the irony of fate the dead man's cousin was actually the only credible witness to the fact that the will had ever even existed. I knew full well that against his word our testimony would have but little weight once we placed ourselves before the Judge as two self-convicted cheats and vagabonds. Moreover, no credit would be yielded Danny for confession of an imposture already doomed to exposure at the hands of the very man it would appear he sought to libel.

And yet—

I remembered that this Judge was the uncle of the girl—a lawyer, shrewd and just. I recalled his

expression of distrust of Chilton, his apprehension that Castleman had committed his confidence too far. Well, he might listen!—he *might*—

Aye, and then there was the money!

Yes, that would talk! Its voluntary surrender would appeal more convincingly than any words of ours—this same money that would have meant so much to us now that we must go our ways again.

I groaned at the craziness of Danny's move.

"Here!" and into his hand I thrust the sheaf of bills. "Give these to him—the Judge, when you bring him here; only don't let me see them any more."

He nodded, and locked them in the old desk again.

Then he blew out the candles one by one.

"Come!" gently.

I sighed as I let him take my arm; and thus in silence we climbed the old stairway through the gloom.

"A clean breast, Dominie," he whispered as we reached his room; "a clean breast of everything for her! And then—"

"And then?" I reminded, presently.

But he had lapsed absently, his head in the shadow above the mantel-shelf. Yet I could tell that he was staring at the dim, square outline of the girl's letter stuck there in the mirror's corner.

XV

CHILTON SHOWS THE DOOR

NOW, the night bears wisdom to the morning's arms. Even when it does not, it is likely at least to bring refreshment to wearied limbs, heartening to distraught minds—calm to tempest-tossed emotions. Therefore, while the morning found my young pal still somber-browed, he was significantly quiet. Only the ember-like glow of his eyes betrayed the fire of wrath that had consumed him when accident betrayed Chilton's treachery to Jean.

Our neighbor down the landing was still asleep we learned from Uncle Alex as he slipped in to make our fires. He would continue to sleep—so the old negro opined—till somewhere about eleven.

Whereupon, as it was then but half past nine, we boldly adventured down-stairs and dared a final breakfasting in state. What's more, despite all, we did it with a zeal and thoroughness that summoned in Aunt Caroline both approbation and joy.

"Lawsie, chile," she droned at Danny, her eyes devouring him with pride, "it sure am good ter see de way you eat!"

And Uncle Alex's echoing cadence was like an organ's chord.

"Heah, honey," he inflected with coaxing unction, "have one er dese heah right-hot muffins. Dey's made wid some er dat water-mill meal you allers liked; an' I wanter tell you-all"—with a glance here that by courtesy included me—"dat you needn't be 'fraid er dat fried ham. Dat's gen'wine, shore-'nuff, home-cured Tenn'see ham—ev'y las' scrap uv it; an' smoked fer six weeks ober hick'ry chips—*yes*, sir! Dere ain't nuthin' laik it nowhar on dis earf—or out of it, *I* reckon."

I was inclined to think so too, with an appreciation heightened by the uncertainty as to where we would breakfast on the morrow, if perchance it would be a matter of breakfasting at all.

"An' to-night we's gwine ter have some beat'n biscuits," Aunt Caroline announced.

"Huh!" from Uncle Alex. "I bet you de Judge gwine ter have a say whar dese two gent'men gwine ter eat to-night!"

A shiver touched me. It was rather more than likely that he would, I thought.

Danny looked at the clock.

"Now, see here, both of you; I want to tell you something." He lifted his finger impressively. "We're going out for a little—er—walk this morning, Doctor Blair and I; and I don't want Doctor —I mean my cousin—to know that I've returned. I want to have the fun of just walking in on him —surprising him. Understand?"

"Yes, sir," mumbled Uncle Alex. He looked at Aunt Caroline, lights glinting in his faded eyes.

They snickered together in some occult sympathy.

"Yes, sir, *we* understand," Aunt Caroline murmured as we arose. "It sure gwine ter be a s'prise fer him, too!" Her face shone.

"Yes, sir, he gwine ter be sorter took back—dat man!" Uncle Alex's cheerfulness was frankly undissembled. "I bet he gwine ter look as s'prised as dat chicken's haid w'at I cut off las' night. I nuver *see* no chicken look mo' s'prised dan one er dem yeller pullets did." And I heard them chortle together as we crossed the threshold.

Happy, care-free creatures! When, after this day, would they laugh again, I wondered.

A cough from Aunt Caroline drew my backward glance. She stood framed in the doorway, her eyes beckoning me shyly. I lingered as Danny moved on.

Her shining face was wistful.

"'Scuse me, but I don't want you ter t'ink I 'uz jus' tryin' las' night to undermine Mister Dick's cousin wid you 'cause you's a preacher." Aunt Caroline looked troubled.

"Oh no, I'm sure you wouldn't," I assured.

Her black face cleared. "Den dat's all right. 'Cause, *no*, sir, I wouldn't do dat ter nobody, do' dey *is* plenty w'at wouldn't 'a' been no ways mealy-mouthed 'bout comin' right out an' tellin' you dat Doctor Chilton ain't nobody!" She sniffed.

"Ah!"

Aunt Caroline's thick lips compressed themselves tightly, indicating her close-mouthed discretion. Her countenance was somber as she shook her head.

"Yes, sir, some folks 'ain't got nuthin' ter do but talk, an'—oh, *I* know! dey'd t'ink you ought ter

be tol' erbout him 'cause you *is* a preacher. But I ain't no han' ter tell tales erbout nobody—*no*, sir!" Her glance ranged guardedly after Danny; then her turban inclined toward me. She spoke behind her lip in a heavy mumble. "Lots er folks 'd t'ink you oughter know 'bout Doctor Chilton—dat he ain't nuthin' 't all—no, sir, jus' po' white trash! —you *didn't* know dat, did you?"

I allowed myself a shocked murmur. It seemed called for.

"La, chile!" Aunt Caroline grunted, scornfully, "*he* ain't ter blame! You ain't gwine ter blame *him* 'cause his grandpa on his ma's side wa'n't nuthin' but a low-down, nigger-drivin' slave-trader —yes, sir, an *overseer!* It ain't *his* fault!" Her ample bosom heaved a philosophic sigh. "Shucks! dey ain't *no* branch w'at ever I see dat run up higher dan de spring!" Then again, as I murmured: "But you mark my words, somebody gwine ter tell you 'bout dese t'ings—dey's *boun'* to, but it ain't no business er mine ter say nuthin', an' I know well 's I know mah name dat Mister Dick ain't gwine ter open his mouth, 'cause he 'shamed uv it. An' 's I say, 'tain't fer *me* ter talk!" She blinked at me.

"*Oh* no, Aunt Caroline, I *know* you wouldn't!"

Her face cleared and she backed in the door smilingly, her turban answering my understanding nods.

"And now for the Judge!" said my pal, outside; and his smile, though faint, was brave. Then as I sighed, with little stomach for the enterprise, "I wonder where he lives."

It was somewhere up the pike I remembered.

A moment's deliberation, and we debouched to the rear—a precaution to avoid exposure to the mansion's windows in the front. Once beyond the circle of cabins, we could see where the broad, white turnpike fell away alluringly to the south—away from the direction of the Judge's home. My eye followed the way wistfully; for there somewhere in that valley lay Nashville—a big city's maze, with trains offering easy means of flight. Beyond those hills lay security for my lad—new opportunity to turn a clever trick that would put him on Easy Street again. The easy way it was—the natural way; the broad way that opened down the hill! As a broken man I viewed it longingly.

So it came that of a sudden as we moved I was inspired with craft.

"The girl! Say, I wonder what *she'll* think—I mean of you!" I dropped it carelessly as though with random afterthought.

But my young pal's glare was javelin-like.

"Stow that!" fiercely. "I tell you this one thing I do!"

Yet, for all, I could see that I had touched him hard. We walked a bit farther and then of a sudden his feet faltered. He stopped, looking back.

"I don't know, though," mutteringly. "Say, we're a couple of fools! Why, Dominie, the thing for us to do—"

His mumble trailed away as he turned him square about. I followed, all a-tingle.

"Yes, lad?" in husky eagerness.

"Why, we can telephone—ask the Judge to come over—and alone; then meet him up the road."

Behind my lip I swore. "And we haven't time," I snarled.

"Plenty"—confidently—"loads of time before that guy gets down." I was silenced, having to remember that Uncle Alex had told us that Doctor Chilton always breakfasted in his room.

"Yes, sir, he yanks de bell-cord w'en he wants his bre'kfus'," the old negro had informed; "dat is, *mos'* all'rs. Sometimes, do', w'en he don't wanter trapas 'cross de floah in his col' feet, he'll jus' lay dere under de kiver an' holler till some uv us come. Dat *his* way!"

Indeed, now, as we neared the house a muffled shouting reached us. It was a man's voice in an angry scolding or calling.

We exchanged glances, harkening.

"I guess it's his bray, all right," said Danny, dryly; "it answers the description. There! I guess they've answered!" For the voice had subsided abruptly.

As we neared the back of the house I sighed, noting the homelike peace and comfort that invested it. In an upper window, Mandy, the house-girl, was sunning bed-coverings, and on the brick pavement below another colored girl was scrubbing clothes. Both were singing, their voices apart, yet blending in a not unpleasing dissonance.

They stopped long enough to grin good-naturedly as we came hurrying; and "Dick's" dog, Argus, lifted his head lazily from the porch-boards and

favored us with a tolerant, incurious stare, not even troubling to wag his tail in greeting. Below him on the steps a cat drowsed in the Southern November sunshine.

Now, from the porch we had view through the long, wide hall to its very end. The front door was still fastened from the night, for I could see where the broad iron bolt was shot. Upon the old sofa lay a silk-lined top-coat and a small case or satchel such as might be useful for a physician's purposes or for carrying papers; both of which, it came to me, had missed my observation in our scramble through the darkened hall to breakfast.

Evidently Uncle Alex and Aunt Caroline both had been required in ministrations above; for there was nobody in sight, either in the dining-room as we passed, or in the hall or on the stairway above. This assurance came upon the instant that we glided across the threshold. For this we did without ado, and with that velvety self-effacement that is the acquirement of all animals whose lot it is to hunt or be among the hunted.

Between the sofa and us was the door opening into the little study behind the library—and this was half open. Beyond the sofa, near the front of the hall, was the door of the library, facing the drawing-room across the hall. Both doors here were closed, and I remembered that we had left them so when we had gone up-stairs to bed.

My pal sidled near the stairway, his ear turned speculatively to the rooms above. Then he nodded with satisfaction. His finger beckoned me nearer.

"Wait back here where you can pipe the floor above. I'm going in to 'phone." Then his whisper edged warningly, "Careful, now, for I've got to close the door!" and with a cat's stealth he sidled from me down the hall's long stretch.

And then, just as he reached the panels of the library door, I saw him start sharply. The next instant there was a bang in the room as of the table drawer closing.

"It's not there at all!" an angry voice lifted. A heavy tread pounded toward the door.

"Mizzle!" gasped my pal and dived for the door across the hall.

Like the lightning's wink it opened and closed, leaving naught behind. So much I saw; then I found myself in the little study, lying back against the wall, panting as I followed a quick tread in the hall, breathing relief as I heard the snap of the satchel's catch and the sound of feet returning.

The next moment, with eyes glued to a crack of the communicating door, I was commanding a view of the library. On the table lay a hat, gloves, a light bamboo cane; but the thing that loomed before my surprised vision was the spectacle of the two old servants, their eyes upon each other, their black faces emotionless, sphinx-like.

And then a man entered, looming like a thunder-cloud; a large man, but flabby and sallow-jowled.

"Maybe this satchel-key will fit." With the mutter he moved down upon the old desk against the wall. "If it doesn't—" He turned a black scowl

upon the old negroes, then bent to the lock in the slanting top.

Meantime I noted with concern that he had left the door yawning wide. It was serious, for the reason that he was in such position as to see any one passing through the hall.

It left my pal marooned.

Aunt Caroline's brow shadowed sullenly; then her bosom heaved.

"Look heah, Doctor Chilton"—protestingly—"*I* cayn't stay heah all day; I got mah work ter do!" She looked at the door, her glance troubled, wistful. "I done tol' you I don't know nuthin' 'bout no key!"

He turned sharply, his thick, shrimp-like brows close drawn.

"That 'll be enough from you!"

The injunction was sternly metallic, pointed by a steely glare. Again he struggled with the key, trying to throw the lock.

She mumbled rebelliously, "But I jus' *got* ter go!" In her emphasis was a quality of desperate need. "You don't know all I got ter do!"

"You'll go—both of you—when you make up your minds to tell where that key is." Here, having failed with the key, he pulled and pounded upon the top, then shook it again in vain.

From my covert I noted the outcome with grim satisfaction. It was like my young pal's canny foresight to have preferred the old desk to the safe as depository for the money. Trust Danny for such things! I wondered where he was.

Dick's cousin looked at his watch, then cast

a glance through the long windows commanding the drive.

"Now look here," he said, addressing Uncle Alex, "the Judge will be coming down here presently on account of my note. There are some papers in this desk that we'll want. Now stop this foolishness and tell me what you've done with that key."

The old butler eyed him gloomily.

"*I* 'ain't done nuthin' wid de key," he mumbled; "I 'ain't ev'n seed it."

"You're lying!" crisply; "you *know* you are! Now tell me—who locked this desk?"

"I don't know, master, 'cept'n it 'uz Mister Dick. I done tol' you dat."

"Dick! Why, you born fool"—with anger—"I tell you the desk was open when I was here Monday; the key was in the lock. Nobody *could* have fooled with it but you two, unless—" His eyes seemed to cloud calculatingly. "Look here"—sharply—"has the Judge been here already this morning—in this room?"

"No, sir"—it was Aunt Caroline's drawl that intervened—"dey 'ain't nobody *pertic'ler* much been in heah dis mornin'—not yit!" Her eyes rolled.

He was obviously relieved.

"That's all right, then," gruffly. "Now, once more—and my patience is about ended—where's that key?"

Her lips pouched.

"La! Doctor Chilton, I done tol' you 'bout forty times ov'r I don't know nuthin' 'bout no key, an' I don't!"

He colored angrily.

"You black-face liar! Don't tell me that again, for I've had enough of it!" and he glowered menacingly. "Don't say it *again*, now. Do you hear?"

She did not say it; but her imperturbed calm, her slow, inscrutable smile, might have maddened a calmer man, I thought.

As it was, he cursed her, calling her a vile name. Then he struck the desk-top with his fist.

"I expect, if the truth was known, there's something stolen locked up in here!" he fumed.

Aye, if the truth were known! Again I wondered where Danny was and if he heard. If so, I could picture his impish joy despite our parlous situation.

"We don't steal heah, master!" It was amazing to me to see this old servant still preserve a bearing of respect—an undiminished dignity.

"Don't steal!" The doctor's short laugh was half a grunt. "I've yet to put eyes on a nigger that don't steal!"

Still Uncle Alex's face remained stolid.

"Dey's a right smart uv 'um don't, master!" Just a quiet speech without a hint of impertinence save the subtle irony of that "master."

But Aunt Caroline's turban went up.

"Yes, sir"—murmurously—"an' dey's plenty white folks, too, dat don't steal!"

The concession was made cheerfully, her gaze directed with pleasantly detached interest to the stuccoed ceiling cornice above the other's head.

The doctor was not heeding her. His eye had

lighted upon something by the mantel that seemed to magnetize interest. With quick strides he possessed himself of the long steel poker, his eye examining the beveled point with a grunt of satisfaction. With another quick glance out of the window, he moved upon the desk with it.

Now the piece was an old-fashioned slant top, mahogany scrutoir of the block-front type, representing the finest work of its period; and this, I knew enough to tell, lay behind the horizon of a hundred years and more. Like everything else about the place it was beautifully preserved.

Therefore I was not surprised when panic seemed to stir the two old servants of the house.

"Lawsie *mercy*, Doctor!" Aunt Caroline's cry was vibrant with alarm. "You ain't gwine ter prize no poker into dat desk, is you?" She waddled forward, hand protesting.

"I most certainly am!"

"My land above, Doctor! you mustn't do dat!"

"Why not?" in defiant contempt.

"*Why* not?" amazedly. "Why, don't you know dat 'uz ole Miss's desk?" Then, as he moved on impatiently, "Lawsie, Doctor, *don't* break dat desk —*please* don't!"—imploringly. "Oh, I wish Mister Dick wuz heah!" Her eyes fixed Uncle Alex questioningly, appealingly. The old man took a shuffle toward the door, only to be brought up by a sharp command from Chilton. The Doctor swung the door shut with a bang.

There was one, at least, who noticed this with satisfaction. Now, I thought, Danny will come through

the hall to me. Meantime Aunt Caroline was still pleading.

"All right," said Chilton, suddenly, "then give me the key."

"Doctor, I *'ain't* got de key—*honest*, I 'ain't! I hope I may die ef I ain't tellin' you de truf! Maybe"—her eyes blinked at the door—"maybe, now, Mandy put dat key sum'w'rs—or I bet Jeff did. Yes, sir, I jus' *bet* you dat's Jeff's doin's. I'll jus' go call him—"

"No!" he barked at her. Then his finger lifted. "Now I *know* you're lying, for just now I saw Jeff from my window, and he said he was going to town —said you were sending him!" He shoved her aside, lifting the point of the heavy iron above the slanting top.

But she laid her broad hand above the lock.

"Lis'n, Doctor—*just* er minit! Dis desk—" She was panting, but not from fear. "It 'uz right heah dat I see ole Miss's sit an' write de las' letter—"

"Get away, I tell you!"

—"de las' letter w'at ev'r went fru de lines ter Marse Richard—"

"*Will* you get out of my way?" and his eyes narrowed.

"I knows, 'cause Alex brung dat letter home w'en he brung de sword."

I could not tell whether he meant to strike her —indeed, it was unthinkable to me that he would dare; but of a sudden the old man's voice lifted, quiet but clear.

"Don't tech Car'line, master!"

A moment's amazed insulted stare, then the sallow jowls went beet-red. The poker dropped to his side and, slipping from his hand, fell thudding to the floor.

"*You* black scoundrel!" With head forward he moved down upon the figure by the table. But the old negro stood his ground. "Do you know who I am?" Chilton blustered.

"Yes, master, I knows who you is!"

Few words and innocent enough it seemed to me; but for some reason they seemed to goad Dick's cousin to fury. One instant, and he reached to the table and caught up the bamboo cane; the next it was in two pieces—and dropping from the former slave's fingers.

"Overseer days is past, master!"

He turned, looking up at the portrait above the mantel.

"My young master dere say dey ain't no man in dis worl' good enuf ter have de right ter lam anuther, black *or* white!"

Fine! but, oh, why didn't Danny come!

Chilton towered, his fingers clenched. He was no longer red, but livid.

"Your master was a fool!" he pronounced, and his voice was hoarse; "and there's too many in Tennessee just like him! That's what's the matter with every last one of you damn niggers! Too many privileges—too much coddling!" And with a swift movement he crossed to the door.

With hand above the knob he turned, facing the couple,

"You get out of here!"—as spoken it might have been addressed to an intruding cur—"and by the end of the week I want you both to be out of this house—off of this place, bag and baggage. Do you hear?" And, glaring, he jerked open the door. "Now go!"

It was a clear way he gave them, for he stood himself a little behind the door—perhaps to avoid contamination as they passed; a clear way, and yet for a moment the two negroes did not move; just stared with eyes distended, rolling. From Aunt Caroline, indeed, escaped an extraordinary sound, a sort of choking snort, instantly suppressed.

"None of that!" sharply. It would seem that Chilton sensed here a prelude to tears—a scene, perhaps. "There's the doorway"—and his eyes, as they tightened upon them, were like rivets, and as hard. "You see it, don't you?"

They looked at each other, then at him.

"Yes, master, we sees it!" The humble, bowed figure straightened like the youthful image in the golden frame above, the dull eyes lighted, lifted upward with ecstatic fire. "Praise de Lord! Oh, praise de good Lord dat dese yere ol' eyes *kin* see it!"

"Yes, sir, *we* kin see it!" Again that inarticulate sound from Aunt Caroline, again suppressed.

And so they moved forward—outward.

So might have moved and looked rapt martyrs in the days of old, human cattle passing outward to the shambles that were threshold to eternal glory. So, I thought, had moved other human cattle of a later day—on past the slave-driving forebear of

the man behind the door; creatures like these, with rolling eyes and working features—passing on beneath the hammer of the market-block.

With their going he flung the door after them—hard, and without deigning to follow it with his eyes. Then stooping, he retrieved the heavy poker and turned to the desk again, his grunt seeming to express satisfaction that he was free now to work his purposes—and alone.

And yet he was not quite alone at that; for there was the figure in the gray tweed cap that had slipped in, eel-like, resting back with shoulders to the wall, drawing with long relish upon a half-consumed cigarette.

So he was not alone, and yet he seemed to be, so motionless did he stand, so soft was the velvet fall of silence in the room.

XVI

THE TRAP

"YOU!"

A long-drawn whisper, faint as the sigh of wind-blown leaf; then stillness once again.

For my pal made no answer, and I guessed that his was a waiting game. I saw that his eyes, keen as a wild bird's, were making swift appraisement of the man before him.

Chilton touched his throat.

"Dick!"—it sounded like a click that his fingers made—"is it—it isn't you?"

And Danny's chest lifted in a long breath. For all his *sang-froid* I knew he was experiencing a revulsion of relief. His eye took on freshened assurance.

"*Hel*-lo!" He smiled, pushing back his cap.

Doctor Chilton stared, colored, then paled again.

"Dick!" his lips framed; but all I heard was his swallow. In the silence a coal fell in the grate.

"Well?" Danny tossed his cap to a chair. "Aren't you going to give a fellow a word of welcome?"

He took a tentative step, holding out his hand. Dick's cousin never looked at it; never even

seemed to see the proffer. He was staring, mouth agape, like one stricken with some frightful hebetation.

Again just that one word.

"Dick!"

"Surest thing you know!"

My young pal took a last quick pull at his cigarette, then tossed it to the fire. He advanced with both hands.

"How are you, old fellow?" and his grasp fell upon the doctor's shoulders.

Whereupon, with the touch, Dick's cousin promptly crumpled to the floor. He lay inert.

I pushed open the door as Danny went down beside the man, loosening his collar and tie.

"It's all right, Dominie," he said, without looking around; "but get Alex—and some whisky."

Five minutes later Chilton was regaining a semblance of life. Presently they got him to a chair.

"Yes, Dick," he answered Danny, but with his eyes widening strangely at him, "I'm—I feel all right now."

"Fine!" chirped my pal, briskly. "Now, I'll tell you; you're going up-stairs and lie down awhile—yes, you must!" He grimaced for us to withdraw as he slipped his arm about him.

"U-*umph!*" Uncle Alex grunted in a sly aside. "'Speck dat s'prise must 'a' bin kinder laik a mule-kick!" Aunt Caroline said nothing. As she looked back at the sufferer her mouth had a twist that was enigmatic.

Twenty minutes later Danny came down-stairs,

his eyes ashine with excitement. I met him in the hall.

"Well, what do you know about that!" he whispered, and his eyes coasted a little dazedly up the stairs. "Why, look here, I had no idea of putting it over him like that. I mean when I butted in on the scene just now. The best I hoped for was just to stall him off about the old desk—this money, you know." He drew a deep breath, eying me with questioning, troubled intentness. "Why, Dominie, it does almost seem like Fate was trying to—"

He checked himself, but through a silence we locked eyes. Then I gently drew the boy down beside me on the old sofa.

"Look here, lad," I whispered, bluntly, "are you going to save this girl or not—her heritage, I mean —or are you going to let her be rooked by *him?*" I jerked my thumb ceilingward.

Whereupon with careful cunning I went over the argument that had come to me, impressing, fixing in his mind realization of his protectorship now of the dead man's sweetheart; of how inseparably linked her interests were with his. A stanch argument it was, too—unanswerable. As I talked I reflected that by the grim irony of fate I had acquired it through the crime of the man up-stairs. Moreover, I showed that even if we took our tale to the Judge and he should believe us, he would still be powerless to save the estate to the girl. So far as her lover's will was concerned, it was as though it had never been written. The Judge could do nothing for her—*nothing.*

"And we can!" I impressed, whisperingly. "Now listen!"

Forthwith I led his mind to the plan I had conceived, keeping ever dangling in the foreground the idea of the dependence of the girl upon him, till of a sudden by his relaxed sigh, his nod, his smile, I knew I had him. As for our success, I felt there could be no question of it—

Now that he had got by Doctor Chilton.

"And yet I don't know," Danny demurred, a little pucker creasing his forehead. "He's no fool, that guy up there. I keep thinking of the cold facts he unloaded about Dick's—about *my* death. Why, Dominie, he *knows* I'm dead—I've *got* to be dead!" And my pal continued dubiously, "Wait till the grubber gets over this knock-out—begins to *think;* just now he's kind of stunned and scared."

I did not wonder, reflecting upon the shock the man had sustained; and then there was the matter of the will that he had destroyed; no doubt he was agonizing over that.

When I mentioned this my young pal's handsome face darkened.

"Let him agonize!" he growled; and lying back, he whipped out a cigarette.

I straightened, suddenly reminded by the sight of it.

"Danny, where on earth?"—curiously.

"This?" He eyed the cigarette pensively. "One of my dear cousin's own—very nice cigarette—Turkish cavalla! Found his case when I was frisking his coat there for papers. By the way"—grinning—"it isn't his coat, anyway; it's one of Castle-

man's." He drew the garment toward him, exhibiting the pocket-label.

"Poor Chilton!" I sighed.

My young pal's grunt was eloquent.

"I say 'poor Chilton!'" he exclaimed. "A day or two later for us and we wouldn't have found clothes to change into!"

I smiled, gratified to see how he was slipping into the rôle I designed for him. Already, to his mind, it was Castleman's cousin who was the interloper, and not himself. Yet I knew that his feeling against the doctor was really on account of Jean.

"He spoke of the will himself," Danny remarked.

"No!" I breathed.

He nodded, his lip curling.

"He asked me if I had looked in the safe yet, and I said no. Then he said he had taken the will home some time ago—for better safety." Danny's mouth twisted. "Pretty raw, eh? Oh, he's an awful tinker, that fellow!" and my pal's tone manifested all of a clever craftsman's profound contempt for a dub workman. "But I swallowed his bunk—I even thanked him; told him just to keep the will in his own safe for me. Gee! you should have seen the guy's face—and relief!"

I was relieved myself. "It was wise," I said, gravely. "Let sleeping dogs lie!"

Presently, left alone by Danny, I rested back in a corner of the old sofa, staring upward through the cool, dim well of the stairway.

Somewhere above lay the real master of Winnicrest!

An odd thought, yet potent with truth; for master he undoubtedly was, at least under theory of the law. Master he would be in very fact, I knew, if once our feet slipped where now they seemed to stand so firm.

And if he but knew! if he but knew!

"If!" My mouth tightened comfortably as I closed my eyes. "Um, 'if'!"

Behind the portal of the library I could hear my lad at the telephone—now laughing softly, now questioning, now murmurous with the tender, teasing badinage of love of the golden time when the world is glad and young. Ah yes, if Chilton only knew!

But he did not know, I reflected, complacently. Like the others, he had succumbed to what was, in my secret opinion, as much the influence of suggestion, of accident, as it was the spell of my young pal's resemblance to the late master of Winnicrest. Yet with his unexpected surrender the last redoubt had fallen; our amazing usurpation was complete.

Odd that somehow now, mingling with my exultation, there was a provoking, haunting element of depression; a queer, half-frightened sense of loss —of calamity fallen upon me.

Why, I wondered, half annoyed. *Why?*

When I came to meet Doctor Chilton later I found in him a much older man than I had expected, for all that I had previously noted his pronounced baldness and the fringe of coarse gray hair. But there was less of the professional cut about him than of the clerical. In England he might have been taken for the pastor of a dissenting church.

"I do love to meet clergymen," he said, with an unctuous smile. "Indeed, at one time I thought it was to be my privilege to be a humble worker in the Vineyard myself, but science claimed me instead." He sighed as one having behind him the tragedy of a great sacrifice.

I murmured my regret for the loss to the Church.

The doctor nodded appreciatively, holding my hand. He was "too temperamental" to be a professional man, he said; "too emotional."

"For instance, this morning," with a wan, deprecatory smile at Danny, "the surprise—the reaction of joy at finding my cousin alive and well —it was too much for me!"

I cooed with sympathetic concern.

"Ah, the thoughtlessness of youth, Doctor!—you must pardon it." I looked at my pal benignly. "I assure you Dick has been very penitent."

Indeed, Danny appeared crestfallen enough. "I just didn't think," he explained; "and you will remember, sir, the Judge played the same surprise upon Jean the other night."

"Ah, but that is different!" I lifted my hands, making it an opportunity to free myself from the fellow's flabby palm. Somehow, with the very touch of it I had conceived a shuddering dislike for him.

The impression was not improved by his rehearsal throughout dinner of all that he had suffered in anxiety during the past months, having no word from his cousin.

"I must say I don't think you've treated me quite

right, Dick!" And he glowered reproachfully. Then, as Danny murmured penitently, "And I *still* don't see—I just can't understand how a man like Carleton Drummond, to say nothing of our consul at Aden, could have made such a frightful—such a *stupid* blunder!" Here the man's tone edged with a certain vicious sincerity. "How *do* you explain it, Dick?"

"Search me!" said Danny, carelessly.

His air of detached interest as he waited to get Uncle Alex's eye was the last touch of art. Upon this occasion, he said, he felt it fitting that we should open a bottle of wine.

The doctor raised his hand in smiling deprecation.

"None for *me*, Dick, please! You know how rarely I touch stimulants of any kind! Well, if you will insist"—for Danny did—"it will have to be just a small glass, Alex; a ve-e-ry small glass indeed!" His smile at the old man at my back was one of melting benevolence.

"Give you one same 's I allers gives you!" Happily a low utterance this, caught only by myself.

I looked down abstractedly, thinking of this man—his age!—yet of my own far greater toll of years. I found myself wondering with odd disquiet whether to an outsider who might know all, I would appear as unlovely as this smug hypocrite sitting there across the board.

I felt relief—and I know Danny showed it—when the Judge was unexpectedly announced.

"Well, Harry!" and his eyes twinkled at Chilton, "were you much surprised this morning?"

The doctor reddened, his little eyes shifting at us.

"I—why, yes," he faltered, "naturally a little." He affected stiff dignity.

Danny intervened. "My cousin," he said, gravely, "was so certain I was dead that he was preparing to turn over to you my will. That right, Harry?" abruptly.

A fractional hesitation, then the other nodded, looking down.

"Yes."

My pal flashed me an odd look; in it was the exultation of one who scores.

"Your will!" The Judge's exclamation was one of blank surprise. "So you did make a will, after all! Why, where has it been? Who has had it?" Then as the direction of my pal's glance led him back to Chilton: "Oh!" and the Judge grunted. "Well, it seems funny, Harry, you couldn't have said something about it all this time." His tone hardened. "You questioned me enough!"

A resentful gleam touched Chilton's eyes.

"I did just as my cousin told me," he said, his voice edging a little; "he told me not to tell a soul. Didn't you, Dick?"

"Sure!" said Danny. Then blandly, "But it's all right now, Harry—now I'm home again; and I'll tell you what I want you to do"—and again his glance feathered me lightly—"I just want you to tell the Judge all about the will."

"*Me* tell him!" The doctor showed surprise. "What for?"

"I have a reason!" And, the Judge being absorbed in a search through some papers, the scamp grimaced significantly at Chilton. "I'll tell you sometime."

"Oh!" said the other, puzzled.

Danny winked.

"Of course," he pursued, "I could tell the Judge about the will myself; but I—er—well, you understand that under the circumstances I would rather not—*you* know, Harry!" He looked from one to the other with an air of embarrassment. "And yet I *want* the Judge to know."

Jean's uncle coughed, pulling at his grizzled mustache.

"That's all right, Dick," he said, quietly. "I expect I could guess at the contents."

"*I* know," interrupted Danny, smoothly; "but I want Harry to tell you himself, because *he* has known all about it all the time. Haven't you, Harry?" Again a cryptic wink for him that might mean anything, and which did mean, I was quite sure—nothing.

Dick's cousin grunted. From under his heavy brows he considered the Judge with a little air of elation, of defiance, even. "I was with Dick the night he wrote the will there at the old desk in the library; I was with him when he sealed it. What's more"—his voice lifted—"I saw him when he put it in the safe. And nobody"—with a perceptible swagger—"had the combination but me."

"Um!" It was a comment without opinion. The old lawyer did not bat an eye.

Danny smiled gravely.

"Yes, Harry was in my confidence," he said, pleasantly; "my entire confidence, Judge."

"Ah!" This time the utterance was unimpeachably polite; yet it seemed a deference to the hallmark rather than the metal stamped. The shrewd old eyes even yielded Dick's cousin a blink of courtesy as they faced him with attention.

"Just tell him *everything!*" said Danny, with another ingenious look at Chilton. "Tell him— Wait!" —eagerly—"You see, Judge, Harry here got worried about the will being out here alone in that old box in there. Didn't you, Harry? Go on, tell him what you did with it—where it is *now!*" and Danny baited his trap with a smile of childlike confidence.

And his dupe walked in.

"I put it in my safe at home!" he avowed, brazenly.

Danny spread his hands.

"You hear, Judge?" and he glowed with proud approbation of such thoughtfulness. "You see, Doctor"—to me, soberly—"Harry took no chances!" and the rogue's nerve enabled him to measure the words with such significance that I was fain to sip my wine lest my eyes betray me. "But go on, Harry," he cooed, kindly, "I want you just to tell the Judge all about that night—how the will was written — *you* know! — and everything that's in it."

So saying, he removed himself to the window. Here, over their heads, he writhed his face at me with joyous diablerie as Dick's cousin began a ponderous recital of how Castleman had made the will

of which he had confessed himself to be the privileged and only custodian.

And I marveled to see how my clever lad befooled these worldly-wise professional men, shaping them to his purpose, twisting them about his fingers even as a maiden winds a vagrant strand of hair.

I smiled within with something of pitying contempt.

He could not hoodwink *me*, I knew!

XVII

THE WAY OF A MAN WITH A MAID

"DOMINIE! Look, Dominie!"

"Eh!" I came to sudden startled erectness on the couch in my room, my eyes blinking confusedly at the watch-dial held before my face.

Four o'clock! Surely it could not be three hours since Chilton had left and the Judge had closeted himself with my pal to talk on business matters!

Danny murmured remorsefully.

"I wouldn't wake you, Dominie, but the old scout may be back from town now any minute." Then as I drooped, still heavy with the fog of sleep: "Have you forgotten? We dine to-night at his place—what's its name?—Holly Court."

Slowly my wits cleared. I groaned at the ordeal in prospect, then nodded to let him know that I remembered.

"Sure you're awake now?" Danny's tone was anxious. "Because, you see, I'm off, myself." Then answering my startled exclamation, "Oh yes, engagement with Miss Logan"—and here the rogue put on an air. "I'm going over in my car!"

"Mm!" I looked him over appreciatively, noting

that from toe to tie my young gentleman was *point de vice* in a carefully achieved harmony of autumn browns. There was a light in his eyes that betrayed excitement.

I could not wonder, thinking of the delicious beauty of the girl. Then there were the circumstances investing the situation—the piquancy—

Well, he was human—and young—was Danny.

I cleared my throat gravely.

"I see," pleasantly. "So you found you had a car, Mr. Castleman!"

Danny grinned. "Surest thing you know!" he said. "My dear cousin has just sent it out from his garage." He added with pensive irrelevance, "I'm going to let Jeff drive me over—as a privilege, you know!"

His glance cut me slyly.

I laughed.

"Fine!" I applauded. Till then it had not occurred to me that "Dick" would be put to stratagem to find where lived his lady-love.

Danny, however, thought of everything.

He even remembered about the jewels. The Judge would bring them out, he said; and for this reason he had given him the combination of the safe.

"And a new one," he explained, dryly, "that will not lead our dear cousin into temptation."

But when the Judge came, nearly an hour later, he did not have the jewels, much to my disappointment. It seemed that a neighbor down the turnpike had excited his apprehension by telling of a nest of tramps located over by the railroad, less than a mile behind us.

"Tramps, Judge—and so near?" I allowed myself an expression of shocked disquietude not wholly feigned. I was speculating uneasily upon whether there might be among them any of our late companions of the road.

Tramps were not necessarily bad, the Judge remarked, but one or two of these had excited some uneasiness in the neighborhood.

"So I thought we'd better leave the jewels where they are for a day or two, rather than—" He shook his head distrustfully at the old safe.

Yet the sight of it reminded him to speak of the will. He seemed much moved.

"It was like Dick," he said; "I might have known."

I smiled upon him with priestly benignity.

"Oh, I did so want to tell you last night!" I murmured, regretfully; "but I hesitated to do so, fearing that as my dear young friend did not speak of it himself he might not like—that he—"

I coughed, affecting embarrassment.

He beamed upon me. "Doctor, don't say another word"—feelingly. "You acted like a true friend and a man of honor, sir! I understand"—nodding—"I understand you perfectly."

I doubted it, but I was of no mind to dispute with him. Yet I could have laughed in his face when he added:

"I have guessed the bond between you two—I saw it last night."

But I did not laugh; instead, I smiled paternally.

"Ah yes!"—with pensive fondness—"Dick is a dear, good boy!"

He looked at me fixedly. "He certainly is dear to you," he said, in a curious, reflective tone; "very dear indeed."

And now, when I *could* have answered him for once with truth, it was odd that I could not say a word. It was absurd, but all I could summon was just a sort of throat click.

He went on. "I have been a long time on the bench and at the bar. I have seen much of the strife of man with man—I have learned how men can hate."

Aye, I could have told him something of that myself. He drew his chair nearer.

"But, Doctor, that is not all"—earnestly. "I want to tell you I have seen something else. I have seen and known how men can love!" His voice, naturally rather grave and stern, dropped here to a cadence almost tender. "I tell you I have seen love of man for man that passeth the love of woman."

From under his brows his eyes held me soberly.

"And I saw how it was between you and—your young friend," he said, gravely.

I looked at him sharply for an instant, awed, half frightened.

I swallowed. He saw much, this Judge!

"I don't know"—he spoke slowly, his glance narrowing, slyly, keenly—"but I'll bet you two have confidences between you that no one else knows—no one else in all the world will ever know!"

O wise Judge! O learned Judge! I rested my chin upon my hand and smiled inscrutably

"Am I right?" He chuckled lightly. "Of course!

—I know I am!" He leaned nearer. "Every man has had such a friend—sometime," he murmured.

"*Once*—yes!"

I blurted it impulsively, almost harshly.

His white head inclined gravely in assent.

"Once"—quietly—"just once. And then, Doctor, it is something like the love of God—closer than breathing, nearer than hands and feet." His deep voice was vibrant in the quiet room. "Such an experience touches all men—once, as you say!—and then, whether they be millionaires or beggars, priests or malefactors, old or young, they enjoy a touch of intimacy—of bonded closeness—that woman in the very nature of things can never know, a relation that is that last word in fraternity—'pals.'" His hand pressed my knee. "And I know that's what you and our young friend are—*pals*."

"Aye, pals!" I spoke it hoarsely.

Pals, indeed, Danny and I!—if he only knew how close! My Danny—the prince of pals!

Of a sudden his eyebrows lifted as he glimpsed his watch. He stood, up and I followed. The last gleam of gold was gone from the window-panes; the afternoon was passing to a mellow grayness.

Impulsively the Judge extended his hand.

"I'm glad we've had this little talk," he said; "I feel that we know each other so much better." I smiled with him, but with different meaning. He went on, earnestly; "I want to tell you, Doctor Blair, that I am satisfied—and so is Jean—that the best thing Dick did for himself on his trip, aside from regaining his health, was finding you and in-

ducing you to pay him this visit. His companionship with you has metamorphosed him. Why, sir"—impressively—"he's not the same fellow at all; but different every way. His voice is stronger; his eyes brighter—more confident; his chin is squared—his whole expression changed! Even my niece"—he smiled—"admits his tremendous improvement."

"She does?" Elation leaped within me.

The Judge jerked a nod as we moved out to take his car.

"She does" he said, cynically, "because she denies it!" He leaned toward me. "More in love with him, sir, than ever!" he rumbled, with a comfortable wink.

I enjoyed the ride. The white turnpike we traveled climbed and dipped and rose again, lifting into view blue-grass uplands that rolled away in waves of changing hue—a verdant sea that swelled and mounted till it broke far up against hills of misty blue.

The Judge waved his hand.

"Ever see anything like it, Doctor?" he challenged, proudly.

My head jerked involuntarily.

Then, as his look questioned me, "Dorsetshire, my home county," I had to explain; "it is very much like Dorset—your Tennessee country."

His face glowed. "Now that is a compliment, Doctor; for I remember them calling Dorsetshire 'The Garden of England.'"

I started. "You have been there?"

He had been, he said, but years ago; it was when

he was a member of a commission investigating penal establishments abroad.

"We were in Dorsetshire," he said, "to see Portland Prison."

For an instant I felt my body relax weakly into the embrace of the softly cushioned corner while I stared off across the broad leagues that stretched away before me. Far and wide as it was, how small a compass, after all, beside the world's big acreage; how tiny a portion of its vast immensity!

And yet—

How small, how contracted, was the world of *men;* how close their elbows rubbed!

"So you are from Dorsetshire!" he continued, pleasantly. "I dare say, then, that you yourself have seen a good deal of Portland Prison."

Had I!

It relished me to answer him with grim facetiousness.

"Aye, I have seen quite a good deal of it!" And I added what was bitter truth, "On a beautiful clear day you can see my church-tower from the prison ramparts."

Of a sudden we made a sharp turn and the car's horn barked a warning.

A shabby figure slouched to the grassy path beside the way; then halted abruptly, staring as we passed—staring, I knew, at me.

I grew cold as his short laugh floated after us; and there was some derisive call to me—happily unintelligible above the noise of our flight.

"Impudent—these vagabonds!" spoke the Judge,

and with a look of apology. "I'll have Stivers round them all up in the calaboose if they are in the neighborhood a day longer than to-morrow."

"I hope they won't be," I answered, uncomfortably.

I was glad when we combed the crest of the hill beyond and coasted down to a parkland of gem-like green.

"Holly Court," said the Judge, simply.

We turned into a rough and time-worn driveway that curved among walks and shrubbery that spoke eloquently of the ravages of neglect and decay. Here and there amid iron pavilions a statue gleamed, some of them inclining slightly, as though bethinking them of flight. Far away a domed greenhouse reflected the fading sky; and still beyond, a tall-storied red-brick tower crowned with a windmill rose from out of a tiny lake.

The Judge sighed as I murmured admiration.

"A show-place before the war," he said; "the pride of the city. Then my father had plenty of niggers and we could keep everything up. Now, with changed times, we're glad to be able to keep up the taxes." Then, as if guessing my thought, "And we can't sell off any of it because it is entailed to my son."

Of a sudden we rounded a dripping fountain whose marble basins were mossy green from long years under untrimmed magnolias, and swung up before a stone terrace whose wide-spreading treads were flanked on each side by drowsing, rusting lions. Beyond I looked to another rise of wide-extending

steps that led to a noble porch with shafts and entablature of purest Greek Ionic.

A colored servant was running to meet us as we alighted.

"Mist'r Ben," she cried, excitedly, "ole Miss, she jus' tel'phone'; she want you ter come right over an' help her 'suade Miss 'Genia ter come take supper. She went over two hours ago to fotch her, but she can't git her started no way 't all. Ole Miss say she come all right ef you's along."

"Oh!" said the Judge, a little blankly. He turned to me. "Miss Eugenia Wood," he explained, "a very old lady — a great friend of Dick's grandmother and very fond of him and Jean. She was godmother to both of them." His troubled glance considered me, then the house, and lastly the car; and I could see he felt in a dilemma. "Miss Eugenia has an old-fashioned horror of automobiles," he remarked, and fingered his chin perplexedly.

"You must go after her," I interposed, firmly.

I insisted, and in the end prevailed; but only after the Judge had himself ushered me within the portals of his home—had seated me comfortably in a beautiful old drawing-room.

Jean and Danny, we learned, were out walking.

"No, sir, Mist'r Ben," reluctantly admitted the old negro into whose care he committed me, "I don' know whar dey is," and he blinked at me apologetically, "but I 'specks"—illuminatively—"dat dey jus' natcherly boun' ter be some'rs." And he shuffled away ostensibly to see, but at a

pace that was scarcely calculated to take him across the park before nightfall would enwrap it.

Left alone, I looked about me with no little curiosity.

Here, as at the other place, I found myself invested by an indefinable atmosphere of old-time elegance and refinement, a ghostly essence that had survived the tragedy of faded grandeur and decay. Like a rose-jar the place was redolent still of something rare that had had its day—of a life and luxury that had been and was no more.

I was glad that it was no more.

Because of Jean!

I was glad that she was portionless; that the place was a ruin and entailed to the Judge's own line. I could have hugged myself if she were poorer still. The more dependent she was the better it advantaged my program for my pal, insuring the riveting of her fate with his, the clinching of his security. Thereafter, if he were menaced, she would be in danger, too; if Danny were hurled from his heaven, so must she drop to the pit beside him.

Their fates would be accoupled, inseparable.

In such jeopardy all my lady's lineage would serve her naught; but I was shrewd enough to know that it would serve my pal. For behind her would be her family and her kin; but behind him would be the girl herself, a wife by then—a mother, perhaps. Let Jean's husband be the veriest adventurer, it was my guess that her proud-crested relatives would endure much, swallow much, and ponder

well before they elected to proclaim the scandal of a debasing *méssalliance*, with all the concomitant taint upon the purity of their blood. Hot-headed, these Southerners, by repute; and I doubted not that they would be mad with rage at any indignity upon a woman of their race, panting to avenge; but their very reverence for her would give them pause ere they unveiled to the world her humiliation and shame. It might be true that mediævalism was dead in this revitalized American Southland, but chivalry—which had been the soul of it—still survived. I had seen enough to know that.

There was every reason, therefore, why the girl was our best card, and I was delighted with the way Danny was playing his hand. If I could only keep him to it.

There was the rub! Could I?

For my young pal was but an indifferent gallant, notwithstanding that nature had blessed him with good looks and something of a way with women—a graceful, winning sort of roguery combined with an aplomb that had been of no small capital to us in our devious, wandering course of vagabondage. For all that, his philandering had been ever of the lightest, despite the fact that no one better loved the challenge of a saucy eye or the tilting with a pretty girl's coquetry. In such lists the scamp was himself at home and ready to lift the gauntlet of any of the fair. Beyond this his dalliance ever drew rein.

There's never a man—even a crook—but has his moral "dead line" about something.

Certainly Danny had his. I had seen him tested a score of times.

Now I was turning over in my mind all these things when footsteps sounded upon the terrace, then within the hall outside. I heard a man's subdued murmur answered by a girl's low laugh.

It was Jean and Danny.

I could not see them from where I was; but opposite the room's door they seemed to pause.

"Silly!" came in light remonstrance. "Of course; every day—all the time. You know I did!"

"Oh, I know!" Danny's growl was lacking in enthusiasm, was even malcontent. "But I'm talking about since I saw you last night. Everybody says I'm so changed, I thought maybe"—the rogue's tone dropped ruefully—"maybe you were disappointed with me."

"Crazy!" Her low coo quivered through a mellow laugh.

A pause, and I could hear Mr. Rowland's light cane making little stabs at the floor beside him. In fancy I could see him looking down dubiously, his clean-cut face shadowed by a wistful self-depreciation—waiting to be convinced.

Oh, the way of a man with a maid!

I nodded understandingly, sitting there in the silence and the gathering dusk; indeed, I all but forgot myself and chuckled aloud. As it was, I could not forbear a grin as I smoothed my wrinkled hands.

An artist—ah, a great artist was Danny!

"Disappointed!" This time her voice was low,

reproachful, vibrant with all the panic of a woman's heart declaiming injustice. "Dick dear, you know I—" Her voice ebbed away like the whispering sea, so that, strain as I might, I could distinguish only its murmur. Then it flowed back again. "And the whole thing—I mean that you are so strong and well, so cheerful, so happy, and—and that you love me so. Oh, I just thank God every—" Speech died again in a long, happy sigh.

A moment, and she laughed softly. "Last night I went all through the prayer-book hunting up everything of thankfulness that I could find. It didn't matter what the prayers were for, I made them mine. They *were* mine"—whisperingly; "it seemed to me I could feel for all the world."

Danny's reply was not distinct. But its low rhythm brushed the air like the caress of a 'cello's bow.

Then lifted his light laugh. "I think I'll have to tell the Dominie that about the prayer-book. May I?" He added, eagerly, "It will help him to know you as you are, sweetheart."

She answered with something murmurous, of which I caught only the end.

"Isn't he a dear!" She intoned it with a tenderness that invoked in me sardonic humor. If she only knew me as I was, this reverent daughter of the Church! "And your name for him, 'the Dominie' —how it suits him! But oh, Dick," with a sigh, "how sad his eyes are!"

My pal mumbled something.

"Poor thing!" Again she sighed, and pityingly;

wherefore I felt my brows knit into a frown. "And she—this daughter—was about my age, you say?"

He muttered, "I think so—just about."

I tried to clear my throat, but its fibers were tightened, somehow. I got to my feet to move toward them—to let them know in some way of my presence.

Danny need not have told of *her*, I thought, reproachfully.

And yet—

Half-way down the room my feet paused in the heavy pile of the carpet. I stood looking thoughtfully, doubtfully at the floor.

Yes, he was right, I saw—and clever, too, was Danny. Grief was a mantle of wondrously secure dignity; a sacred vestment in whose presence curiosity was humbled. Before it questionings were silenced.

Out of a murmur my pal's voice lifted.

"I am sure," I heard, "that he thinks of her all the time."

I nodded where I stood, my teeth gripped upon my nether lip to stay its foolish quiver. For there the lad had touched truth at random and touched upon the raw.

"The poor dear!" plaintively. "Oh, Dick, how pitiful is age like that! to have to go on, on, on through all the long years alone! And yet, dear"—she dropped to an awed, half-frighted whisper—"that would have been the way with me if you had not come back; if all the cruel things your cousin said had been true—oh, if they had been true!"

Again his murmuring answered her.

A stanch heart, my lady fair! In the shadowed room I stooped forward, smiling comfortably, my head angled to the door, my hands in tight clasp behind my back. A stanch heart—a rock of gold upon which our cousin's precious suspicions or evidences hereafter must split themselves in twain.

Evidence here? I compressed my lips to stop a grunt of scorn. What evidence of death could avail against the reality of a living, throbbing presence? what witness be believed? Standing there and listening, I knew that a very cloud of witnesses would not serve to wrench from this girl her happiness.

Love had come into its own and it could live and thrive on faith where reason would despair.

Meantime in my ears were the girl's low measures, responding to Danny's soothing murmurings, and in her voice was peace. An ardent lover, this young pal of mine, breathing his flame in tender perjuries that might have beguiled the Queen of Love herself! Harkening to the two, I could have laughed aloud at the comedy of it.

I did smile broadly in content, looking out through the window beside me into the misty blue November twilight.

Far up near the top of a great magnolia my eye caught a leaf that was slowly falling, falling—a long, narrow leaf it was, that twirled as it fell, as though it were some prey about which swirling currents fought.

I watched it, mouth compressed—nodding.

Aye, my cousin, if you would find evidences that

would avail here you must go far and dive deep for them!

Deep!

Somewhere out of sight the leaf sank to rest.

I smiled, thinking how fathomless, how kindly secret is the sea.

An exclamation sounded from Jean.

"The night is coming, Dick dear," came her sweet-toned Southern drawl. "Come on; let's gather our roses while we may."

From behind the curtained windows I watched them as they moved down the terrace, and in the searching light of day the girl had more than piquant prettiness. She had the beauty of distinction such as I had seen in young English girls of noble lineage. She might have been the daughter of a line of earls.

And Danny?

Danny bent above her like a courtier-born!

Through the twilight I strained after them, thinking of another who had walked in the pleasant eventide and gathered roses with loving care for "Daddy" —but long ago beyond the sea.

Down the marble way they moved, on past the drowsing, rusting lions, at which my pal seemed to glance curiously, making some jest that gave her merriment. So, with their heads together, they rounded the dripping fountain with its mossy bowls, passed into the umbrage of the evergreens, were lost to view.

Silence a moment, and then again I heard the girl's laughter from afar—and now a lilt of song.

It lifted supernal like the carol of an English lark—care-free and clear, charged with the joyousness of girlhood and happy days.

O Love, so arrogantly rich in joy, dost thou not fear to mock the jealous ear of Death?

XVIII

A FACE AT THE WINDOW

"REMEMBER she's ninety-eight and deaf as a stone wall," the Judge admonished me.

His wife was presenting me to "Miss Eugenia," a tall, venerable lady whose thin, refined face looked out pleasantly from a quaint little hood of black lace. Lace mits also enveloped her hands, and the silk of her wide, full skirt bristled with a heavy stiffness that seemed to decry the necessity for the supporting cane upon which she leaned.

She looked the personage.

"In her day the toast of Washington and a belle of two continents," proclaimed the Judge without effort to modulate his voice. "Would you ever think it?"

I might, I thought. I had seen rare china from which time and wear had filched the last figment of emblazoned bloom and beauty, but whose quality still was there—as rare china. She was like that, this serene-faced old lady, a gentlewoman of long ago—and still. There were many such still living in England—but more beneath the sod. My mouth tightened as I thought of one above whom the yews had been greening for fifty years and more.

Miss Eugenia received me graciously.

"Ware," she said, in a voice still sweetly clear, "is a name well known to me. Are you connected with the Lincoln County Wares Doctor?"

Danny essayed my rescue.

"Blair," he shouted; "not Ware, Miss Eugenia."

The old lady's head bobbed.

"Yes, the Wares were from Virginia," she said, placidly.

The Judge was staring at Danny. His expression was amused, puzzled.

"Why, Dick, what are you thinking of?" he remonstrated. "Have you forgotten that she never changes a name from the way she first gets it?"

Danny affected a nod of sudden remembrance.

"Oh, that's a fact!" he chirped.

The grin he flashed me was a bit sheepish.

Jean bent to Miss Eugenia's ear.

"Doctor Blair doesn't know Lincoln County—he doesn't belong to Tennessee." She shouted louder, "He belongs to England."

"Oh, New England!"

The old lady's eyes fluttered an instant with the faintest of startled quivers. Her tone dropped with an indefinable inflection. It was as if her godchild had said I was from Senegambia.

Then her mettle rallied her.

"I think"—smiling at me with shy sweetness—"all the Virginia Wares came from the New England branch." Then, generously, "They were all fine people without exception—very high-bred and refined."

I bowed my acknowledgments.

"One of the Virginia Wares was a second cousin of my mother's," pursued the old lady, proudly. "He was a man of parts. He fought five duels and killed his man every time."

"Ah!" I said, for want of other words.

"The Wares," said Miss Eugenia, with dignity, "were all men of dash and valor." And I thought her bright eyes touched my clerical attire with something of regret.

And so we moved out to the dining-room.

On the way Mrs. Logan addressed Danny, explaining that "his cousin" had been detained by a patient's relapse. She was sorry he could not be with us.

The Judge and Jean echoed her, but perfunctorily. It was clear that the regret sat lightly upon them, one and all.

The hostess paused an instant to speak into Miss Eugenia's ear.

"I was just saying to Dick how sorry we are that Harry Chilton is not with us to-night."

The old lady's eyebrows lifted. Her lips puckered.

"Too bad! too bad!" she said, "I am sorry to hear it, but not surprised." She shook her head. "You can't be surprised at anything you hear about Harry." She addressed herself to me in a tone of friendly confidence, "The Chiltons, Doctor Ware, were good people—Dick himself is one-half Chilton, you know; but Harry's people on his mother's side —oh"—sharply—"they were nobodies!"

At the table I found myself placed opposite Jean

and Danny, with Miss Eugenia beside me. We were hardly seated before the ancient lady leaned toward me, speaking in an undertone.

"Harry Chilton's grandmother," she continued, darkly, "was an overseer's daughter!" and I recalled that Aunt Caroline had told me the same.

"It is never spoken of," Miss Eugenia murmured, and straightened stiffly.

I shook my head, my lips compressed. For I knew that I must understand—if I never had before—that descent from an overseer's daughter was a genealogical estate so low as to be unplumbed by any words of explanation.

The Judge was sitting in waiting attitude. Catching his wife's eye, he sent her an appealing smile.

She turned to me. "Doctor Blair—"

But Miss Eugenia spoke again.

"I have always been glad," she said, with grave complacence, "that I was never so unfortunate as to marry. It is a *very* hazardous step, Doctor Ware" —dubiously—"but more especially for a woman. She can never be quite sure what she is mating with. A sweet, refined girl might become mother to a line of degenerates; she might—"

"Doctor Blair," Mrs. Logan intervened, gently, "won't you ask the blessing?" And she bowed her head.

I swallowed heavily and for a moment balked in panic, looking at Danny. But all had their heads inclined. About my young pal's mouth I detected the creasing of a smile—his shoulders moved the slightest.

There was nothing for it but to pull myself together and summon words long unfamiliar; and I did. To my relief and surprise the phrasing came easily, a mechanical reiteration of former practise; but in my ears how strange—this first prayer upon my lips in years!

With the "Amen" Danny's head lifted. His eyes were dancing at me; in them I read ironic applause.

But the sweet-faced old lady at my right was claiming attention again—completing her interrupted sentence.

"She might, you know, marry a thief," she said, distinctly.

I bowed, looking away, avoiding the uncanny brightness of her eyes. Across the way Danny tripped for an instant in his talk with Jean—then went serenely on.

It was the Judge who answered her. his eyes a-twinkle.

"Suppose," he shouted, "that the thief loved the girl!"

The little lace hood faced the speaker.

"You mean if he really loved her?"

"Yes."

She was thoughtful. "In that case"—quietly—"he wouldn't sacrifice her."

The spoon between Danny's fingers rested. Jean was addressing to him some laughing question, but she had to repeat it before she got reply.

The old Judge grunted good-humoredly.

"In my time I've known some thieves who made

very decent husbands," he commented, dryly. "She *could* do worse, eh, Doctor Blair?"

"Aye," burst from me impulsively; "she might marry a titled beast, buttressed with respectability—a drunken brute who in his cups would beat her—break her loving heart — kill for her the joy of life; maybe in time kill—her!"

I stopped, abashed, frightened.

I had spoken passionately, forgetting myself and the rôle I played. The others about the board were startled into silence. Jean's pretty face suddenly went troubled, wondering, as she looked from me to Danny. I dared not follow her there, for I knew by the fixity of my pal's head that his glance was boring hard at me.

Was Danny very angry with me?

I wondered, miserably.

I must know, for, after all, what Danny thought of me was all I had to care for in this world. I summoned courage and looked into his eyes.

And in them I saw only pity and love!

He smiled brightly, cheerily. Jean, taking her cue from his face, sent me a smile, too—a beam of sunshine.

Heartened, I inclined my head at the Judge's wife, murmuring apology.

"A clergyman," I said, "sees many things behind life's curtain—little dramas behind the scenes. Some of them are so tragic, so heartbreaking, that they become very intimate—very personal to those who minister to human woe and sin. Their memory lingers." I hesitated an instant and continued more

slowly; "I was moved just now by recollection of the case of a young girl, one as young"—I looked at Jean—"as sweet and fair as you. She married a man, one of our gentry, who sought her, won her love." I paused, pretending an effort at remembrance; then with my voice under command I went on. "For two years he cruelly, brutally maltreated her." I lifted my glass of water and drank.

The Judge's wife spoke out of a murmur of indignation.

"I never can understand," she said, "why in this age a woman will live with a man like that!"

"Because," I said, "she loved him; because his orgies of drunken fury alternated with periods of tragic remorse that deceived her—kept her hoping."

The Judge's eyes blazed.

"Had she a father living?" he asked, shortly, "or a brother?"

"A father," softly.

"Oh, indeed!" Then, as I did not go on, "What was he doing all this time?" His tone was quiet, but with an edge like flint.

I waved my head gently my hand tracing with a bit of silver the damask pattern of the cloth.

"It was all kept from him. I—I am sure he knew nothing, suspected nothing. The revelation came only when—when one night she was borne to the rec—was brought across his door-sill—dying."

Out of the silence the girl's sigh lifted.

"Poor thing!" she breathed.

Mrs. Logan uttered an ejaculation of horror.

"You mean"—she gasped—"oh, you don't

mean, Doctor, that this man—her husband—killed her?"

I was silent.

A stare, and then the Judge drew a long, heavy breath. He looked down, his mouth tightened like an iron vise.

He was very human, was this Judge.

Mrs. Logan was trying to communicate to Miss Eugenia the substance of what I had said.

"For that reason," she finished, breathless from shouting, "Doctor Blair thinks that for a girl to marry a man who would be cruel to her might even be worse than marrying a thief."

Miss Eugenia looked at me with the thoughtful, groping expression of the deaf who do not understand.

"Thief?" she said, "what thief?"

"Any thief," bawled the Judge; "but in marrying a brute Doctor Blair thinks her happiness might be even in greater peril."

"Oh!" Miss Eugenia's face cleared. She looked at me with surprise, shaking her head. "Oh no, Doctor Ware, I'm sure there never was one greater than Murrell."

The Judge lifted his eyes helplessly to his wife.

"Missed it a mile!" he muttered, disgustedly.

Miss Eugenia's eye fixed me determinedly.

"Before the war—" She paused for a sip of water. I heard the Judge groan, though he smiled at her kindly, interestedly. "Long before the war, Doctor Ware, the name of John A. Murrell was spoken with awe in every part of the South."

I inclined my head to her, then looked at the Judge with manifestation of polite inquiry.

He grunted. "A celebrated thief and murderer who once flourished in these parts," he explained.

"Oh!" I busied myself with my plate. I was glad that Danny was talking animatedly to Jean.

He did not hear.

The Judge coughed apologetically and fidgeted, slightly embarrassed. Hastily he began to address me upon the subject of differences between the American and English churches.

But the terrible old lady was not through.

"I saw Murrell once," she said, her eye holding me—"it was in Nashville—in court, the time they branded him on the thumb. I was just a little girl with my father, but I remembered it, because Murrell was such a handsome young man—oh, no older than Dick here—and dressed in the height of fashion. He never flinched," she finished, in reminiscent tone, "though it made a sound like frying."

The Judge cleared his throat uncomfortably. He leaned smilingly toward the deaf lady.

"Dear Miss Eugenia"—he laughed—"Doctor Blair is not interested in our murderers and thieves. He is a clergyman!"

The little curls behind Miss Eugenia's ears bobbed energetically.

"Clergyman? Oh yes, frequently," she said; "it was one of his favorite rôles." Again her bright eyes fixed me eagerly. "He was a wonderful actor, Doctor Ware, and didn't hesitate to mingle in any

society. I remember hearing my father say that almost all great criminals were good actors."

Jean faced us brightly.

"Still talking of thieves?" she said. "Oh, I just adore anything about thieves and robbers. They are so romantic—so comic-operaish. I just love them!"

Danny looked down at her curiously, his face lighting in a wan smile. She did not see, for her eyes were dancing michievously at her uncle.

The old gentleman coughed.

"Don't believe her, Doctor Blair." His eyes held her fondly. "The only thief she has ever had any experience with is—is *here!*" His suddenly extended hand was laid smartly upon a sleeve—that of my young pal, who jerked. "He stole her heart away!"

Danny's handkerchief brushed his forehead. For a moment he sat back in his chair and I saw his chest rise under a long breath.

Mrs. Logan inclined toward him considerately.

"Dick, is it too warm for you in here?"

He looked indirectly toward me and the old whimsical smile touched his lips—a wireless for me alone, I knew.

"I thought—for a moment—it was going to be"—gravely.

The hostess signaled a servant, who slightly opened the long French window behind my pal and Jean. He thanked her, calling her "Mrs. Logan."

The Judge lifted his brows.

"'Mrs. Logan'!" he repeated, dryly. "My, how formal we've grown!" He addressed his wife soberly,

with a mimicry of awe, "Continental manners, you see, Kitty; we old-fashioned folks will have to mind our p's and q's!"

Jean's laugh was hollow—derisive.

"Oh, Uncle, that's *nothing*"—with icy sweetness. "I'm glad—yes, I'm humbly grateful"—mockingly—"that Dick condescends to remember my name. He affects to be so forgetful—oh, so *blasé!*" She turned from him with a little moue. "He's come back horrid! I don't like him any more at all."

Danny swept the table with a glance. Then he looked down, speaking something for her alone.

She shook her head wilfully. "No, I don't," I heard; "I don't think you're nice, one bit!" A little tilt of chin emphasized her captiousness. "Indeed, I mean it!" looking at him defiantly. But behind the saucy flash of her eyes glinted little star notes that told another story. "Uncle, I never saw any one"—with emphasis—"that a year could change so, and change so disagreeably, as it has Dick!"

"Well, upon my word!" The Judge affixed his glasses with a well-affected air of consternation. He winked at his wife. "My!"

But the smile with which that good lady brushed us was imperturbed.

"Why, Jean!" she murmured, gravely.

It was a gentle admonition that had in it no other emotion than amusement. She resumed attention to some speech of Miss Eugenia's.

As for Danny, he just sat there beside Jean, looking down at her, his mouth twisted in a way half dubious, half whimsical.

"Go on," urged the Judge, in a tone of suspicious cheerfulness; "tell us how he is changed. I've seen so little of Dick since he got back that I haven't noticed anything the matter with him."

"*You* wouldn't, anyhow—of course not!" scornfully. "But, Auntie"—plaintively—"don't you remember how really nice Dick used to be about trying to please me and—and *agreeing* with me? Well, he's *no* more like that now." Her side-glance at the culprit was withering in its disdain. "Dick is just as obstinate as he can be. He won't tell me one word about what he's been doing—what he's going to do. I ask him about his trip and he says 'Oh, bother the trip!' and he goes on talking again about —about what *he* wants to."

"Ah!" said the Judge, with a tone of relish that might have been induced by the savory turkey that had just been placed before him. "And what *is* it he wants to talk about?" He beamed interestedly, encouragingly.

But his niece tossed her head, ignoring the question. She addressed herself to me.

"Why, before Dick went away, Doctor Blair, he was the gentlest, sweetest thing! He used always to give in to whatever—anything in the world I wanted. He *never* crossed me!"

Her uncle bent over his carving, murmuring something to the effect that Dick was in better health now—stronger; perhaps that was it.

"You all may laugh," said the young lady, struggling herself to continue severely grave, "but Dick Castleman is no more like his old self—"

"Glad to hear it," said the Judge, heartily. "I believe I see some improvements myself"

My lady's pretty eyebrows lifted delicately.

"Well, I'm glad you *think* you do," she said, pointedly. Her inflection implied that she certainly did not herself. "And that's not all; he behaves so —so funny."

"Um!" Her uncle cut Danny a quizzical glance. "What does Dick do—especially?"

I wondered, too.

She hesitated. "It isn't so much what he does as what he doesn't do." She studied Danny with frank puzzlement that was not abashed by the bland pleasantry with which he deliberately faced her. "He acts as if he didn't have any interest any more in anybody he ever knew. You know you do, sir!" severely. "Uncle, he acts like — oh, I don't know"—she hesitated again, lapsing thoughtfully — "he behaves — well, as if he were a *stranger!*"

The Judge's lips rounded as if to whistle.

"Dear! dear!" he said, with tragic gravity; "now that *is* something!"

He deposited knife and fork with deliberateness, straightening and glaring at Danny with heavy, judicial sternness.

"What have you to say for yourself, sir!" deeply. "Nice indictment for a young lady to have to bring against a gallant who has been a-roaming—Heaven knows where—for a year! Behaves like a stranger, does he?" sympathetically. His voice lifted. "Well, upon my word, sir—"

"Oh," from Jean, hastily, "I don't mean that way! I—"

She stopped confusedly, her glance feathering me shyly, her face all glorious with the hue of the roses at her breast.

The Judge faced her innocently.

"What way?"

Danny intervened. He assumed a mildly injured air, addressing Mrs. Logan.

"Jean thinks I ought to inquire about every man, woman and child and horse within ten miles the first day she sees me." He added, dryly, "What's more, she expects a man to come back from around the world madly frantic to learn all about the season's débutantes."

Jean sent him a withering glance.

"Mr. Smarty!" And she went on with even calm: "I don't anything of the sort! But I *do* think you ought to remember the names of your friends when they are mentioned—*that* much!"

The Judge intervened. "Give him time," he said, good-humoredly. "A man gets a little dazed in a year's travel abroad. Remember, Dick here has only been back in this country four days."

A sound like a chuckle drew my ear.

I lifted my eyes as the others talked, and caught the gleam of a white face etched in the opening of the French window behind my young pal's back; a rough, unshaven face that leered at me with malignant humor and understanding; the face of the tramp whom the Judge's car had passed just before we reached his home; a face familiar, but which I could not place.

So much I saw, and I alone; then came a dog's rush and growl—an oath—a padding of flying feet upon the turf without—and silence.

Conversation paused a moment.

Then one of the negroes looked in. "It 'uz one er dem low-down prowlin' tramps, Judge," he explained. "But de dogs shoo'd him off."

The old Judge fell back, his eyes snapping. "Now this is a little too much!" he said, addressing the table. "When they get to coming right around the house I—" With an apologetic murmur he arose. "I think I'll telephone the constables about this nest of ruffians right now while I think of it."

With his going, Mrs. Logan sighed, looking at Danny.

"I believe I can stand about anything in this world but a *thief*," she said.

"And I!" said Jean, with note of scorn.

Danny's cup jarred upon his saucer as he set it down.

XIX

DANNY'S MOON-MADNESS

DANNY was oddly silent as we drove home. I was quiet also. For one thing, there was the face at the window that gave me food for thought and about which I had told him—nothing. Anyhow, the fellow was not likely to cross our path again if the Judge did his part upon the morrow.

It was late, and the Southern moon, brilliant as a silver sun, bathed the old turnpike in frosted splendor.

Of a sudden my pal slowed down and the car took its time between the long lines of ancient fencing. His voice broke the silence:

"Say, that was a thimble-rig game we were planning, wasn't it?" His laugh sounded nervous—hollow. "I mean for this girl." Then, mutteringly, "For of course we can't go on."

In the moonlight I searched the boy's face sharply. I did not like its troubled perplexity, and he avoided my eye. It was a bad sign.

What notion had the soft-hearted young fool now?

"Dominie"—again his hand touched me—"let's leave her out of it."

"Leave her out!" I repeated the proposition

harshly, amazedly. "What are you talking about? Why, you fool," derisively, "we can't leave her out! We might as well leave ourselves out!"

"All right," readily; "then let's do that!"

I straightened back, studying him.

"Say, are you crazy?" I snarled. "What do you mean? Didn't we agree that we— See here, you're not meaning for us to quit the game—*now*, when you've got by with this doctor chap so smoothly?" This artfully.

He nodded. "Unless we leave her out." His voice was low, just a little hoarse. "I tell you we mustn't go on—at least not with her in it. Look here, Dominie, it's not fair."

"Fair!" The word goaded me to sudden anger. "What have you and I to do with what's 'fair'? What *is* fair in this cursed world? Fair!" contemptuously. I subsided, growling irritably. "What sort of guff is this you're talking, anyway?"

He made no reply, but moved up speed, taking a hill with a rush. It was the last hill before Winnicrest, and there upon its summit he abruptly brought the car to rest. The engine subsided to a pulsing drowse.

"We'll have it out right here," said Danny.

I looked at him keenly, then shrugged.

"Fire away!" I said, and settled doggedly in the cushions. The night was fine, with just a pleasant tang of cool; and I was not worrying much over what he might have to say. I had a card or two up my sleeve if I needed to use them—I knew my young pal's soft-heartedness so well.

"See here, Dominie," said Danny, tensely; "you may talk, but you've *got* to think about what's fair—sometimes." His hand jerked off his cap, slapping it against his knee. "Why, look here, I remember that even in 'stir' we used to think of that; and there it was just concerning *men*—and such men! Yeggmen and thugs and felons they were, and—"

I grunted. "Like yourself," I took him up short; "and like me! Don't get patronizing, Danny lad, now that you're up in the world!" I laughed jeeringly.

"I know," somberly; "but if such men as these could show forbearance—could strive to be fair—"

I turned impatiently, facing him squarely.

"Say, what's eating you?" I demanded, resentfully.

"Just this!" His voice lifted, his hardened palm striking the steering-wheel a blow that rang. "I'm no moll-buzzer"—meaning a thief who cheats or robs a woman—"and I never have been. Here we're going ahead, planning to cozen and trick a helpless little girl"—he gestured helplessly. "Oh, I tell you, Dominie, when you think of what I am it's not fair; that's the word—not fair!" To my amazement, the boy covered his face with his hand. A groan escaped him.

It was time to draw one of my cards from my sleeve.

"So you want to toss the game, do you?" I challenged, gloomily; "want to throw me down!" I spoke reproachfully. "Oh, well, lad, of course I

can't control you," I sighed; "and I'm too old to contend. Of course," I went on, mutteringly, "I did think we were partners in this, but—" I shrugged, lapsing into silence.

"Dominie"—his hand gripped my knee—"don't put it that way, old man! Now look here—listen! Try to think of it as if this girl were your Marjorie you've talked so much to me about; think of her refinement, her innocence—just like your little girl! And then, Dominie, think of *me!* I'm not fit to touch the tip of her finger, and yet—" His chest lifted in a sigh. "Oh, Dominie," he muttered, "she's good, this girl—she's *good!*"

"Good?" I repeated the word with something of bitter venom. "Why shouldn't she be good, eh? —with life all velvet and roses and coddling, and never denied a whim! Has she ever had a raw deal? Ever had to shrink from that terror by night to a woman's soul—the stumbling foot upon a stair? Has she ever had to battle with her own for happiness—for life itself? Has she ever known cruelty, suffering, or grief through the thing she loved; ever had to bear it all alone and *still* be good? *Has* she? Yet there are women who are doing this, let me tell you, Danny Rowland—doing it now, through all this long night; not a few, but thousands, tens of thousands of them—off there! and there! and there!" My arm struck at the horizon with each word. "Prisoners of hope; prisoners of despair, too; women who suffer hell and still are good! There are women like these, I tell you; and yet you talk about this girl being 'good'!" I sneered bitterly. "This

spoiled household darling, who has never known a ruder touch than a petting caress; a society butterfly, who has never heard a harsher word than flattery! 'Good'!" fiercely. "What's to keep this girl Jean from being good?"

He flung his head up.

"By George, nothing!" There was a ring of exultation in Danny's tone; in it, too, was a certain quality of surprised elation, as of one who stumbles unexpectedly upon a pleasing discovery. "She is good *in spite* of all you name—and *that's* why she's wonderful!" He faced me. "Say, do you know I never thought of that before!"

I gloomed at him dourly. "It's not the only thing you haven't thought of," I said; and forthwith I I proceeded to play the other card up my sleeve—to show him that the course I had pointed out was the only one to save the girl from the disaster of a great despair.

"I know," he checked me in tone half angry, "but to go on is to do her a great wrong—a lifetime wrong, Dominie, and you know it!"

"Well, that's true, lad," I answered, humoring him, though I wanted to laugh at Danny preaching; "but here's the way you must look at it: a lifetime wrong," earnestly, "or a lifetime sorrow—which for her?" And I shrugged. "It's just got to be one or the other."

A cloud swept the face of the moon, and in the shadow he seemed to droop behind the wheel.

Poor Danny! I leaned toward him, speaking craftily:

"And is there anything can outweigh a young girl's happiness—and love?" Then, as he looked at me oddly, wistfully, "Is there for her anything better than these?" earnestly.

The smile he lifted was woebegone.

"Nothing," he said, dully; "nothing, of course, but—honor!"

"Honor!" I jeered with angry scorn. "What in hell's name have you and I to do with honor?"

He looked at me, eyes brooding.

"Nothing," again simply. Then his chin squared. "But we must think of *her!*"

Now it was hard to be patient with his persistent balking, but of a sudden I thought of something else.

"What of her interests under the will—now that Chilton has destroyed it?"

I thought surely I would have him there, but his smile flashed faintly; a whimsical complacency touched his mouth. He thought Judge Logan could handle that, he said—that is, *now*, in view of Chilton's admissions.

Chilton's admissions! So *that* was it—that was why he had lured Dick's cousin into his cunning trap! I had wondered. It was for this girl! Every thought now was for this girl! I turned on him, whipping him with jealous reproaches.

"What's more," I fumed in conclusion, "you're a fool for your pains; your little scheme won't work—I can tell you that! Why, you boob, Chilton can snap his fingers at them, and he will, unless she—" I stopped with a caustic laugh, a jeer. "Oh, you can better believe my lady will come round.

You bet she will; she's no fool. Yes, sir, she'll marry Chilton!"

"Don't!" It was a note of pain.

I exulted. "Touched you there, didn't I?" And now the unction was gone from my voice. "It hurts, doesn't it? But it doesn't hurt you to toss your old pal—oh no, that doesn't hurt!"

And the plaint of my own voice fanned my resentment, my jealous sense of injury, so that I went blindly on to do that which I knew would grieve and confound him. Few men there are but know the joy at times of hurting the thing that most they love. And it is a kind of joy that is supremest when the thing we love loves us the more. And now of a sudden it came to me how I could cut the ground from under him.

So I lifted my face into his and with deliberation uttered the relentless maxim of the underworld: "Pals first!" And I made him the sign.

"No! no! Dominie!" He shrank, clutching my fingers from before his face. "Not yet! Wait, Dominie! *Don't!*"

But I wrenched my hand from him.

"Pals first!" I hissed, and made the sign again.

And so we hung there, our eyes locked. In his was panic, grief, even, but no yielding.

"Dominie," he breathed, "listen—"

"Danny lad"—and my voice was strange to me; all atremble it was, though resolutely hard withal—"shall it be the third call?"

For I knew, and he knew, that if I made the third call, then it must be the end; then, by the unwritten

canon law of the underworld, he was recreant—could be my pal no more. Then and there must our ways divide, and if possible we must meet no more.

Such was the law!

But now, as I looked into the boy's pale face and thought of all we had been to each other, my fire of anger died to ashes. I cursed myself that I had given him the sign.

For now I must go on!

There was no way back for me, for such is the law of the road.

"Don't, Danny," I uttered, faintly; "don't let me have to say it—*don't!*" I caught his hand, fondling it between my own, all aquiver as they were by now. "You're all—why, all I've got in the world, Danny lad," my lips faltered.

A sudden choke seemed to shake him. His eyes glistened, pearl-like; his face went white.

"Now God forgive me!" he gasped, and caught his arm about my stooping shoulders, raising me.

"Look at me!" he said, and held me off.

And then he made the answering sign.

"Pals first!" his whisper came.

I looked at him hard, but his smile was brave and kind. And I knew that he meant me to know that his moon-madness was past; that now he would play the game unto the end.

"Pals first" it was to be; but I felt no spring of elation. Instead, a half-shamed feeling was mine, for I had given the "sign" to Danny!—to Danny, who had been so good to me! It was a step I could never take back—would never forget.

I had scored, but, as many a man had done before, I had scored through the yielding of another's love. I had gained my point, but at a cost; I had won, but at a loss. I strove to rout my brooding doubt with the specious argument that the loss was but a thing of mind—something imponderable and therefore of no account.

Of no account?

In my troubled soul a haunting misgiving whispered—an echo from that time when I had taught other troubled souls that it is only the imponderable things that are of any account whatever.

And so, with both silent, we dropped slowly down the slopes to Winnicrest; and presently, half a mile away, I could see the house itself. Now as I saw it gleaming there, jeweled like a white cameo against the dark umbrage of the great magnolias, my spirits lifted, for it looked a fair prize for any hazard.

It was all Danny's, I whispered to myself; all Danny's now. Then I smiled. No, not Danny's, but "Dick's," for the past was dead, and out of it now no ghost could rise, no menace come.

A shrill whistle, twice repeated, sounding clear above the onward rush, above the padding of the tires! Ahead of us I saw a tree-branch quiver, then swing low, dropping a dark figure that stood forth in the moonlight with arms raised high in air!

A cry from Danny, a curse from me, and the car was throttled to a stand almost beside the spot where the man stood, a sinister blotch beside the silvered way.

"I'm waitin' fer you, Danny!"

And in the hoarse chuckle I recognized the laugh of the man I had encountered in the road. Familiar, too, the mocking grin he lifted in the moon's rays—the same leer with which his face had favored me as it looked in upon the little company about the board at Holly Court.

XX

AN ENCOUNTER

WITH sinking heart I looked at Danny, too late regretting I had not warned him.

But now a surprise met me. He sat forward, his face lighted with a friendly grin.

"Well, strike me if it ain't the Squirrel!"

Thus with smooth glide his speech shifted to the vernacular of the road, his voice even taking on its familiar whang-like cadence.

The Squirrel! I recalled him now as a quondam road companion. I remembered also that he had lifted a friendly hail to us only the week before. Unquestionably, it was this circumstance that had provoked his chuckle to-night when listening to the talk about my pal's sojourn abroad; about his "return" within only the past few days.

I waited apprehensively.

"Well, well! and how's luck, Squirrel?"

Danny's greeting was imperturbed and hearty, but the fellow scowled.

"The luck is on the fritz," he growled, sullenly.

"Um!" from Danny, sympathetically.

With deliberation the Squirrel took inventory of the car and of ourselves, his face curdling sourly.

"All of us ain't got de gift of gab of yuh an' yer side-partner here"—this with a malevolent gleam at me. "We can't all go 'round in our ottimo-beels rigged out in broadcloth scenery—eatin' chuck wid mil-yunaires!"

Again Danny responded with a sympathetic murmur, but I felt him vibrate in the seat beside me.

The fellow slouched nearer. "No, sir; not *all* of us can't; some of us has got to keep along in de wallow!"

The Squirrel pointed his remarks by a copious expectoration at the ditch beside his feet.

Again I felt Danny vibrate.

"Ah, true! true!" he sighed. "As you say, it's an unequal world, Squirrel. I often feel pained, myself, at the disproportions existing about me, and that is why in my humble way I strive to equalize—shall I say readjust?—the—"

"Can dat josh talk!" Hoarse anger swelled in the fellow's voice; he took a step, his arm menacing. "Yuh don't try to string me wid no wind-jammin', Danny Rowland; I tell yuh flat!" Then, louder: "I won't have it—yuh hear? I won't *have* it!" and his fist quivered.

"Why, Squirrel!" A moment, and my young pal had scrambled past me into the road. "Look here"—with blunt concern. "What's the matter with you? What's loose?"

But the other backed, growling like a distrustful dog, his rent sleeve fanning Danny away.

"Dat's *all-l* right!" with intonation that implied that it was anything at all but right. "*I* know yuh!"

—with lip a-curl, the Squirrel bobbed his close-pulled cap in a succession of sagacious nods. "I know yer tricks, you Danny Rowland! Huh! I've seen yuh too many times puttin' up yer high-brow chin an' laughin' to kill at people in yer sleeve. I know!" Then, fiercely: "But yuh ain't goin' t' hand *me* no bunch of guff! No, sir, I didn't come here fer it!" Again the Squirrel's lips sought emphasis through a libation to the dust.

Danny smiled. "Oh!" mildly. "What *did* you come here for, Squirrel?"

The fellow's answer was a laugh—an ugly laugh that had in it more significance than a world of words.

"Yes," he jeered, "wot *did* I come here fer—wot?" He sidled nearer, his bearing truculent.

Now my lad's hand had gone into his pocket, where I knew he had a roll of bills. But now, what with the other's manner, I saw his smile fade, darken to a frown. His hand crept back into the moonlight—empty.

"*Is* there anything I can do for you, Squirrel?" The tone, still friendly, had a harder timbre.

The Squirrel leered upward at the Queen of Night.

"Is dey anyt'ing he kin do fer me?" he mocked, mincingly. "*Is* dey? Say, is dey? His roy'l highness condescends ter ax if dey's any little t'ing he kin do fer me!" The Squirrel spat feelingly, his round, bullet head protruding, turtle-like, his features contorted in a saturnine grin. "Say now, *ain't* yuh kind!"

Danny smiled, composedly. "Well, that's the way

I mean it, Squirrel"—evenly—"to be kind." He went on, "And I'll say now if there's any favor I can do you—"

"*Favor!*" with accent of derision. "Huh! I say favor!"

"Favor," definitely.

Whereupon, the Squirrel cursed Danny, and with elaboration and fervor. "Yuh'll do wot I say, Danny Rowland, an' dey won't be no 'favors' about it. Ter hell wid yer favors!" he finished, with scorn.

At which my young pal just smiled, though a bit wanly it seemed to me. "You didn't always say that, Squirrel."

I thought I saw the fellow swallow, but his face held loweringly.

"T'rowin' it up ter me, eh?" It was a sullen growl. "Well, never mind; we ain't goin' back ter dat. Wot I want now is wot's comin' to me, an' no favors; 'cause I've got yer number, Danny Rowland!" His voice raised. "I tell yuh I'm on!"

"I don't know what you're talking about," said Danny, with well-assumed indifference.

"*Don't* yuh!" The Squirrel chuckled, maliciously. "No wonder de gal said yer mem'ry was failin'." Then, as Danny stiffened, eying him askance: "Oh, yuh needn't look at me! I'm on, I tell yuh! Yuh can't give *me* no stall!" The flourish of the Squirrel's expectoration here marked the vain futility of such essay. "Yes, sir"—with a look around at me—"de minute I lamped yer pal here to-day all dolled out fer a parson lay, I says ter myself, 'Squirrel, dey's somethin' doin' an' Danny ain't fur away.'

So I ups an' tails along after; an' w'en it gets dark I slips around an' listens. I heard the niggers talkin' about some doctor whose nose 'd been put out o' joint by his cousin not stayin' dead, an' den—den I listen'd at de dinin'-room winder, I did."

"What! So that was you—"

"Dat's wot!" The fellow's leer now was of malignant understanding. "Oh, yuh're a good one, Danny!" And again through his teeth the Squirrel saluted the road, his sagacious nods conveying admiration. "Yes, sir; yuh're a capting w'en it comes ter pilin' on bunk, I'll say dat! Lor'! I t'ought I'd die list'nin' ter all dat hog-wash dere at supper about yuh not bein' able ter remember t'ings no more 'cause of yer havin' been so long in Eu'ope, when *I* knowed—" The Squirrel grinned tantalizingly, stroking his stubbly chin. "Say, it's a good t'ing yuh an' me happens ter be old pals, ain't it, Danny?" Under the velvet cajolery was a significance that caused my lad's face suddenly to harden. "Gee! wouldn't some folks like ter know wot I know; an', oh, say"—with a leer—"dat purty chromo yuh was soapin' up to, wouldn't *she*—"

"That 'll do!"

The crisp warning brought a coarse chortle from the Squirrel.

"Oh, I ain't a-blamin' yuh in *dat* quarter, bo!"—this in hoarse confidence—"fer she sure is a swell looker, Danny. Reg'lar bit o' jam, *I* call her. I dun'no' 's I ever see a skirt dat so took *my* eye—" He lapsed to sullenness again before Danny's angry explosion. "Huh! I ain't good enough ter talk

about yer new friends. Dat it?" Then as my pal turned disgustedly to the car he squared his burly figure before the running-board.

"Oh?" said Danny. His smile glittered, frost-like.

"Dat's wot!" said the Squirrel with a head jerk. His fingers clicked peremptorily against his extended palm. "Here, now, you come across, an' quick!"

My pal slowly shook his head, still smiling. In the moonlight his eyes seemed tipped with beads of steel.

"Nothing doing, Squirrel!—nothing that way!" Then, with exasperation, as the other stormed: "You're going about it all wrong, Squirrel—you born fool! Can't you see?"

"See nothin'!" and the fellow braced himself belligerently. "No, sir; yuh ain't goin' ter drive off an' ditch *me*, yuh kid-glove grafter—no, sir. I'll bash yer— *Ow-w!*" in a howl. "Leggo! Wot yuh doin'?" chokingly.

What Danny appeared to be doing was savagely applying thumb-pressure to the Squirrel's neck, bringing him gaspingly to his knees. Then he flung him from him.

"Manners, Squirrel!" pleasantly.

I sank back, feeling relief. Now Danny could at least go on.

But he did not. He waited as the other got to his feet, cursing volubly.

"That 'll do, Squirrel," said my pal, presently, and with weariness. "Now you come here and tell me what you want. If you don't—" He stepped a foot upon the running-board.

The man came, fists clenched and elbows curved, yet keeping a wary distance.

"Well, I want my bit!" hoarsely.

"Your bit?" Danny's brows contracted, quizzically. "What for?"

"*Wot* fer?" with sullenness. "Why, fer de job youse is on." But I saw his eyes drop before Danny's steely glare. "Aw, well, I know I ain't in on it, Danny, but I— Well, I don't care," desperately; "I've got ter have my bit—I've got ter!"

Yet he looked downward, his warped shoe scraping the limestone powder of the road. Standing thus, his ragamuffin figure projected a grotesque shadow upon the moon-laved way.

And still my pal said nothing—just looked.

The Squirrel shifted uncomfortably.

"I don't care. I got ter have my bit!" A mutter it was by now, and low—seeming to answer a something far within. And now, oddly, I felt a pang of sympathy for the fellow—I felt I understood. It was queer.

"You give me my bit, or I'll"—the Squirrel gulped—"well, I'll snitch!"

But his shabby cap drooped lower, and the shadow in the dust appeared to shrink into itself, crablike. As for Danny, he said never a word; but I saw him straighten and his nostrils swell.

And now, with his cold eye unwavering from its fixed regard, he slowly dug his hand into his pocket and withdrew a roll of bills.

Silently he extended it.

The Squirrel's head came up—then his hand.

Clawlike, it darted forth and seized the bills, clutching them close to his ragged breast.

"Ach!" he breathed.

And so he stood, a pathetic figure, it seemed to me; for I was watching him now with all my soul, frightened by my understanding of him; yearning toward him, wondering what he would elect to do.

"Danny!" A step forward, a sickly smile, and then a whispering gulp, "It's all right now, old pal—eh?" His free hand went out.

But not even was it touched by Danny's eye. His face, as it hung there in the moonlight, was like chiseled marble—and as cold.

Now of a sudden he drew himself past me to his seat again; his eyes went ahead, his hands slid to position upon the wheel.

"Danny, just a minute!"

For answer, the car vibrated with a roar, the cylinders gathered energy. We moved ahead again.

A wild cry, and the Squirrel flung himself at the car, gripping himself in place just as my pal threw the throttle wide. Standing thus, the man shouted something into Danny's ear; then the bills struck the seat between us, bounding to the floor. I saw the Squirrel double himself, crouching for a leap from the flying car; and then, even as Danny turned his head, shouting at him, his place was clear.

Another warning shout from Danny—this time to me—then a jarring shock. After that, it was to find myself hurrying back afoot with him up the

road, rubbing the while the shoulder that had struck so hard against the heavy wind-shield.

"You're all right, Squirrel; yes, sir, you're all right!"

The Squirrel, doubled lumpishly upon the wind-blown bank of leaves that had checked his hurtling flight, blinked dubiously.

"Naw, *I* ain't no good!" he uttered, gloomily.

From which I knew he knew, as I did, that Danny was not speaking of escape from broken bones and bruises.

"You're all right, I tell you!" My young pal's voice rang gleeful with elation. "Pshaw! but I knew you were, Squirrel, all the time!"

"Lor', Danny, I couldn't 'a' snitched on yuh!" The man spoke wearily, shamefacedly. "I knowed a minute after dat I was just bluffin'."

"Why, of course you were!" chirped Danny. "I knew that."

But the Squirrel still drooped.

"I wouldn't 'a' done like I did, only fer me bein' plum nutty wid worryin' about her."

"Her?"

"Me old mother," he muttered; "she's a-dyin'—an' dey say it's erbout me—'way up in St. Albans, Vermont." And answering Danny's shocked murmur, his hand fumbled in his pocket, producing a letter which my young pal held to the white light of the moon. "Me pals over at de dump shook down four bits fer a telegram, but de lightnin'-jerker wanted more. I jus' been crazy—plum desp'rit,

Danny, an—" A snorting sob choked utterance, and the poor bundle rocked, hands twisting.

"It's all right!" My pal paused to nod brightly, then finished reading. "I see! I see!" and his voice was still cheery; "now don't you worry any more, Squirrel—not a minute. Why, look here, let me tell you something: I believe she'll pull through if you get there— Wait! listen!" He stooped, speaking hurriedly to the other's ear.

The man started, his head lifting.

"Lor', Danny, after wot I— *Naw*, yuh're kiddin' me!" aggrievedly. His head fell.

"Shut up!" said Danny, brusquely. "You come along, now, and leave it to the Dominie and me. Come!"

But the Squirrel did not move, save for the working of his fingers among the leaves. "Lor', Danny!" he breathed again, and something clicked in his throat. Again a wide-eyed, incredulous stare. Then, as my young pal nodded, grinning, the Squirrel's eyes softened — doglike. Doglike, too, his restful, surrendering grunt as he answered the pull of our arms, scrambling awkwardly to his feet.

"And, Squirrel—" Danny smiled.

The man looked at him, then at the outstretched palm. A gasp, and he caught it between his hands.

And once more the moon projected an odd shadow of him on the white dust of the turnpike; an odd shadow, but not this time grotesque—certainly not to me. For poignantly it brought back to me a thought of the chancel window in the little church in Dorsetshire, with its figure of that other ragged

wanderer stooping in the road when he was yet a great way off from home.

But it was not a stooping figure that, a little later, bade us good-by under the trees at Winnicrest. In the Squirrel's hand was an old suit-case, crammed with clothes from the superabundant wardrobe of the late Richard Castleman; and in his pocket was money. He was grinning happily, for already over the wires a telegram was racing through the relays to the mother in the hills of far-off Vermont. He was to take the morning train from the junction near the tramp "dump."

He had pleaded that he might go back there to get his dog.

"It ain't much of a dawg," he was moved to admit; "just a little bobtail tramp dawg as tuck up wid me de other day. But he *did* take up wid me"—proudly—"an' when I was all down in de wallow. Lor', Danny"—appealingly—"I can't ditch him now!"

"Well, I should say not!" heartily. "Why, Squirrel, I wouldn't *rcspcct* you if you did; no sir, I wouldn't! Why, a dog, Squirrel"—Danny seemed to grope for something expressive—"a dog's a *pal!*"

"Dat's *wot!*" The Squirrel's head bobbed. "Pals first, ain't it, Danny?"

And, my pal smiled, his kind eyes on me.

"Sure!" he said; "and always!"

"Always!" I echoed, firmly. "*Always!*"

And oh, I thought I meant it!

XXI

THE SPELL OF JEAN

LOOKING back now, I know that the working of it began with the drive I took next afternoon with Jean. Aye, even back of that I think was the moment before we started, when there in the hall at Winnicrest she drew the pink rosebud through my coat.

"It's a Killarney rose," she murmured, low; and her soft eyes met mine full. She smiled.

I started, and for an instant fell all a-trembling. For it meant to me, she knew, that Danny must have told her that my Nell, the mother of my Marjorie, had been a Killarney girl. I remember with what quick reproach, what pulse of anger, even, I looked across at him. But he was all unconscious—one of Miss Eugenia's little triangle of courtiers—there with the Judge and Chilton under the fanlight of the door.

And then my eyes came back to Jean to find her pretty face half troubled, her brow in wistful frown.

"But maybe you don't like such foolish garnishing," she said; "some gentlemen don't, I know.

Uncle just hates it." And her hand moved as if to withdraw the rose.

"Don't!"

My dry gasp was involuntary. So, too, the action that laid my wrinkled hand on hers. "Thank you—my—my daughter!" and my lips tightened hard.

A glance of concern, and her little palm turned up impulsively, clasping my own with quick pressure. A smile flashed; her kind eyes warmed with tremulous light.

After that—I know not how it was—but when we had left Miss Eugenia beneath her own roof-tree and were flying along through a land that looked like home to me, it seemed natural enough that I should find myself answering questions about my Marjorie; talking of the days when we had driven in the chaise together. It may have been the soothing anodyne of the far, blue, lifted hills, the cheery brightness of the flying mead, perhaps only the exhilaration of the crisp, sweet air—that moved me to such mad forgetfulness of what I was—of all I had been in the years that lay between. These things must have had their part, I know, but that which chiefly worked the spell was the winning lure of Jean's interest in my pretty bairn—her questionings of what she was like; her understanding murmurs, her bright nods; her misty shine of eyes that showed her sweet concern that I should be bereft of her.

"You poor dear!" she murmured once. Three little words for me, but in them all the balm of woman's divine motherhood for whatsoever is help-

less or in straits. "Am I anything like her, I wonder!"

Aye, wasn't she! The impression of it had been growing upon me more and more as we sat there together in that little, padded jewel-box. Very like!—the vernal sweetness of her; the flower-like refinement; the noble poise of head—

"Ah, so like!" I blurted, studying her.

And then all of a sudden, with the smile she flashed, there came a panic upon me; I shrank together with a frightened consciousness of what I seemed in her eyes and what I was not—would be never more. Thunder seemed beating in my ears—the voice of Sinai crying the monstrousness of my association there with anything so innocent, so good.

It must never be again—no, *no!*

What was it she was saying?

"So I'm coming by every day to take you for a drive—yes, I am!" determinedly. "And you must talk to me of Marjorie; that is"—quickly—"unless you mind."

"Mind!" hoarsely.

Oh, the sweet, woman's wisdom of her to know! For, oh, the heart-hunger of it—the thirst; the yearning that we have to tell of *them;* the sad, glad joy to talk to some one who will listen with concern—will feel, will understand!

In sheer gratitude I led her to talk of other things: of "Dick," herself, the town, her life, her tastes. She chatted of her chums, the shows, the church, and slyly sounded me upon the new dances that were coming then in vogue.

Of these I knew naught, but I could tell her of the May Day and countryside dances that made glad the peasantry of my native land. Whereupon her friendly interest beguiled me into talk of our village; of its sequestration and its unspoiled peace, its homely rural folk and their simple ways. I found myself telling of my parish.

My parish! I had forgotten that I had no parish; that all of which I told was of my life of years ago.

Aye, I had really forgotten, and remembrance came only when the drive was over and the girl had gone her way up the long, white turnpike, taking my pal home with her to tea. Then, what with the twilight fall and my loneliness, remembrance dropped upon me like a pall.

I marveled that I should have forgotten.

Withal, I was beset with shame—half angry, even—that I, a man of iron, should have proved such a thing of sand between the fingers of a chatty, silly girl. Hours later, when Danny returned, I was still in a brooding wonder over it.

The boy came whistling, eyes ashine; and it was easy to see that here her influence had been felt as well. Certainly in the buoyant mood that sat upon him there was no reminder of the gloomy, conscience-pricking dubiousness that had so weighted his spirit the night before. It was clear to me that, come weal or woe for Jean, my pal had cast the die; and that with the casting he had put from him all further speculation as to the outcome—all care.

I was not surprised, seeing that all through the morning my lad had been at pains to make me feel

assurance of his loyalty to our comradery—his complete surrender to my will and plans. And now some witchery of the Southern night—some magic of youth and romance—had completed all for which I had hoped and dreamed. Something had transpired—I could see that—something that had given the whole situation a different twist for him, another angle. It would seem that he was finding it a pleasant road to travel, this primrose path of dalliance I had shown.

Certainly the boy had changed. The glister of his eye, his set of jaw, his gaiety—all proclaimed decision to take the gifts the gods had given and tread the broader way. Aye, and he would; he'd tread it like a king! With bridges burned and purpose fixed, my pal would turn no more.

No more!

An echo from my soul it seemed—like fall of coffin clod; a muffled heaviness that told the death of Honor—the burial of all things chivalrous, all things true and good.

"Say"—Danny's gloves, hurled ball-like, struck me in the chest—"you old schemer, you're not hearing a word I say! Cut it out!"—sharply. "I want to tell you what Jean said of you." His eyes sparkled. "Say, believe me, you certainly put it over to-day!"

"I?" I sat up, alert, startled.

"Look at him, innocent!" My young pal's mouth twisted mockingly. "It's all right, though—you can get away with it." He fixed me with an appreciative grin. "That sad, saintly, wondering

expression—oh, you can do it! No wonder she thought you such a gentle, sweet old man—a sort of Vicar of What's-his-name." He chortled an instant over a fresh cigarette, his eyes aslant at me. "And all that bunk you spread about the old village and about your parish! Never mind; it was great!" His face warmed admiringly. "Smooth work, old chap—fine!"

I smiled faintly, and he came over, resting his hand upon my shoulder.

"But look here, Dominie," and Danny's voice changed—was touched with grave concern—"don't you let her make you talk about *her*—your little girl. I wouldn't: you don't have to do *that*, you know."

I muttered something—what, I do not know.

"No, sir!" and the boy was very earnest; "I'd make her steer off there, I would!" His dark eyes held me kindly, anxiously. "I don't know—I'm rather afraid you've got yourself in for it—poor old chap!" He smiled faintly. "She's coming for you again in the morning, you know."

In the morning! Something leaped within me—a glad impulse that was half akin to pain. In the morning!

Danny laughed, watching me.

"Poor old pal!" gently. His hand patted sympathy. "Never mind; come on to bed. Let's forget it."

Forget it! In my room I lay awake for hours, yearning for the day; for the sunlit morning when she would come with her sweet, kind smile and cheery

voice, and we should ride again and talk of her—my little Marjorie.

But with the morn came Danny, a noisy chanticleer, flinging wide my whining shutters to the sun, hailing me to wakefulness an hour before my time.

He had not slept for hours, he said; just lying there and studying—worrying over what a duffer he had been.

"Just woke up and lay there with my bean all buzzing; thinking suppose—just *suppose* you had let me ditch the game as I wanted to the other night. Great crimini! It just made me sick." And his tone plumbed deep disgust. "Say, but I must have been soft—a regular Willie boy!" And he eyed me, sheepishly.

I lay looking up at the silken pleats of the bed's red canopy, and answered nothing—save a swallow.

The boy laughed. "Hell! you know I was!" He shrugged, his lip a-curl. "*You* had the head, the sand—I didn't; *you* framed the game; you *made* me play it! I want to tell you, whatever comes, the credit's yours." He found my hand, patting it. "You'll remember?"

Again I swallowed. "I'll remember."

He rattled on, cording his robe reflectively. It was strange, he said, how circumstances *did* make you look at things so differently.

"Aye!" I subscribed with impulse that made him look at me. "Yes, it's strange enough," I mumbled. My fingers veiled my eyes, affecting to smooth the sleep therefrom.

He moved to go, then turned. "You know what I mean, don't you?" and his smile questioned. "Jean, you know—because of her."

I closed my eyes.

"Of course; because of—Jean."

Danny's tongue clicked. "Yes, sir!"—with feeling—"I tell you it made all the difference in the world the minute I woke up to it that it was me she cared for—me for my own sake."

"What's that?" I raised on elbow.

He looked back from the door.

"That's right, Dominie," and his head bobbed confidently. "I tell you that *I know!*" His sly under-smile at me was half abashed; yet withal, triumphant, self-assured. "A man can tell!"

He nodded with a long glance—was gone.

Left alone, I remained there upon my elbow, staring upward at the golden light shaft that streamed through the tall, old-fashioned window.

For his own sake, he had said.

And why not—why shouldn't she love him for himself? There was every reason for it; every likelihood she did.

As he said, a man could tell.

Aye, he could tell! I knew, I remembered that myself. For the old have been young, and memory burns with immortal flame long after the blood has lost its fire, the heart its throb celestial.

"And if this thing be true of Jean"—so spoke my lifted hope—"it makes all the difference in the world; it changes everything."

Does it? That sigh so far within!

Why, yes, it did change—it must change everything, for surely if it be she loves my lad—

Ah yes, if love—if love were only all!

It *was* all! It was all the world to them! for love in youth was all there was in life—'twas all! Thus, pleadingly, did I put it to my troubled soul.

Silence within, and in the room about me; nothing astir—only the dust-motes in that beam of heavenly light. Silence, yet beyond the portal there—the world's door now, it seemed to me—my young pal whistling with a conscience free. I listened, broodingly.

Of a sudden the whistling ceased; Danny's quick tread pounded in the room beyond. His exclamation startled me.

"What is it?" I scrambled to where he was glowering through a window. Then I saw.

Dr. Chilton was striding rapidly up the drive. He looked excited.

XXII

THE TURNING OF THE WORM

CHILTON'S greeting was abstracted.

A grunt for Danny, a jerk of head for me, and it was obvious that so far as he was concerned the amenities were satisfied. He even waived the vain formality of hand-shaking.

"Got something to show you," he began, clipping short my pal's apology for our scant half-hour's delay; "something that came this morning." And he produced a telegram.

"Yes?" and Danny's smile was pleasantly receptive. Yet his eye fixed the paper with a certain tenseness that I thought I understood. I knew there was but one thing in all the world he feared—the long-reaching, groping arm of the warden of San Quentin.

"It's about you, Dick," Chilton continued, unfolding the paper.

"Ah-h!" But Danny's tone was cheerful now, with a relief that again I understood. For he was still "Dick," it seemed; not yet overtaken by the shadow of Danny Rowland.

"A message," resumed Chilton with heavy im-

pressment, "from no less person than Dr. Carleton Drummond."

A stare, and Danny's face dropped.

"Oh, *him!*" with unflattering slump of interest. "Shucks! Has *he* broken out again?"

Dr. Chilton coughed, his brows contracting.

Now, more than once the day before I had detected a certain surprised resentment in his eyes when at times in conversation he was confronted with Danny's naturally easy self-assurance and decision. And I had meant to warn my pal that his manner toward the other, while civil enough, hospitable enough, was probably deficient in an element of submissive deference that, from all accounts, the younger cousin had yielded to the elder. Yet, thinking of it now, I had my doubts as to whether Danny could ever bring himself at all to ape the respect the other "Dick" had given—the pampering that Chilton's pride demanded. For, leaving out of account the aversion that the man inspired, my lad was, after all, but a wild, free thing—a faun of the open fields and woodland; a creature little given to man's obeisances to man.

So now I could interpret understandingly the surprise—rebuke even—that was concentrated in the doctor's frown.

The new "Dick" sustained the regard serenely.

"Well, go on—read the telegram!" he urged, with careless peremptoriness. "Let's see what new mare's nest the old fossil has dug up."

The doctor's face winced.

"The 'old fossil,' as you call him," he said, with

cold emphasis, "has not 'dug up' anything. He has simply answered a telegram I sent last night. I thought fit to tell him of your safe return."

Danny's grimace expressed annoyance.

"The thunder you did!" he exclaimed, with an impromptu irritation that I recognized as all assumed. "Say, for crimini's sake, what are you trying to do, Harry?"—sharply. "Want to get me into the Sunday papers?"

Dick's cousin reddened to the ears. He stiffened.

"I beg your pardon," he said, with throaty congestion. "I'm sorry if I have done something you do not like!" A brave patter, whose sincerity was belied by the resentment blazing from his eyes.

Danny yielded a mollified grunt.

"Oh, well, it's all right! You didn't mean anything, Harry, I know"—magnanimously; "you just don't *think*." Then, as the other swallowed hard, he jerked a nod at the telegram. "Oh, it's all right! Let's have the thing, now you've got it." His tone was paternal, indulgent.

But beyond a gulp the doctor did not respond. With mouth compressed he sat looking down at the floor, his foot tapping, his thick brows whipping a heavier frown.

My pal cut me a wink. Then with hands behind his head he lay back in his deep chair, studying Dick's cousin curiously, amusedly, his bright eyes a-twinkle with the shrewd appraisement of him who knows his world of men.

"Aw, go on!" he said, with genial irreverence; "let's hear what the old skate says!"

Again the other winced at the lapse from English pure and undefiled, and Danny chortled softly, his eyes agleam with fun.

Now a man not attuned to humor has little stomach for another's raillery, as Chilton emphasized with a click of the tongue. He lifted a hurt, funereal smile.

"Never mind, Dick," he said, heavily, "you don't have to hear this unless you want to."

My young pal's eyes brushed him with velvet calm.

"Don't I?"—gratefully. "Well, now, it's good of you to let me off, Harry."

Chilton's head came up and forward.

"*What* is that, Dick?" The cold truculence of his narrowed glare was as a sword-blade half unsheathed. I doubted not that it would have stirred the other "Dick" to panic.

But this "Dick" sustained the regard composedly; he did not repeat himself—in fact, he was at no pains to answer anything. But his chin suddenly protruded like a wedge of granite.

Abruptly the doctor stood up, buttoning his coat with the air of one offended. His tightened lips proclaimed as plainly as words that unless he were quickly appeased he would be gone, and that, once gone, his cousin's threshold might never be darkened by him again.

Oh, the tyranny of hurt resentment! What an iron heel it is upon the necks of the sensitive and helpless or of all who love too kindly! What humble placating its black selfishness demands, what tribute,

what surrender! In my ministry I had seen prisoners of love behind domestic walls whose lot was less happy than some in Portland prison. It came to me that we were having a glimpse of the tactics through which this man had controlled the poor youth whose devotion he had so long abused.

Danny considered him placidly.

"Going?"

Chilton drew himself up.

"I think so, Dick!" stiffly. His chin jerked upward, his tongue sucking a click against his teeth. A frosty smile my way appropriated me as a sympathizer who would know there was nothing else for him to do. And so he moved to go.

Danny's murmur was regretful but imperturbed.

"Sorry," he said, rising; "thought you were going to stay to breakfast." But he stood with the repose of one who has accepted the decision of a parting guest as final.

Yet it was not intended to be final, as I knew, for Danny had told me as we dressed that in all probability Chilton wanted to see him about a loan he had anxiously tried to discuss the day before, but could not because of the presence of the Judge.

So that now, going still, but not gone, the doctor looked merely foolish. Also he looked black reproach for being suffered to go at all. A stiff-neck pride pulled one way, his necessities the other, and thus he balanced like an awkward horse, uncertain how to tread, or where.

"Good-by," he said, coldly, and boldly essayed another yard.

Danny looked after him, arms folded, rocking on his toes.

"So, so!" carelessly—the "good-by" of thieves at parting.

And there came a pregnant pause.

Now the whole thing reminded me of a school-boy interchange, one of those pivotal rencounters upon which mastership may hinge. Such issue was hinging now, I knew—an issue that my pal was deliberately forcing through some wisdom of his own. Yet I had no perturbation—certainly no thought of intervention by hint of word or sign. Danny knew his little book far better here than I. But, for the doctor's sake, I had strolled to one of the bookcases some distance up the room and affected to be engrossed in the titles that stood within. The glass of the doors made an excellent mirror of the scene.

As for the telegram crushed in Chilton's hand, I had for it no fear, for I was satisfied that its information had not been of a nature to arouse the man's suspicions. I questioned whether anything could do that now.

Chilton's head beckoned to the hall.

"I'd like to speak to you just a minute, Dick," he said, stiffly; "a matter of business."

"Business!" Danny lifted a hand. "No, sir!" laughingly. "Not for mine! No business before *breakfast*. It's bad enough any time, but—"

The doctor growled something about the business being a personal matter.

"It's—*you* know," and he gloomed at Danny significantly.

But it would seem that his cousin had grown strangely obdurate in his year of absence.

"Nix—not!" flippantly, and Danny backed a yard. "None of that serious stuff on an empty stomach!"

Again with an angry flourish Dick's cousin made a start; yet again discretion stayed his steps. With knitted brows he looked off, chewing the cud of reflection.

"I suppose, then"—ungraciously—"that I'll just have to stay to breakfast."

"Why, no-o"—with abstraction Danny lifted what seemed a bit of lint fiber from his sleeve—"you don't *have* to, you know; but we'll be right glad to have you."

The big fellow digested the distinction sullenly. Then with a puzzlement in his eyes that held a touch of something not unlike a frightened awe he drew back into the room again—back to the seat he had so arrogantly vacated.

And here Danny balanced before him, hands in pockets.

"And now," he said, bland as a spring morning, "we'll have the telegram!"

It was not a request; it was still far from being a command; it was just the bald announcement of a fact.

We would have the telegram!

And we did. But to save his remnant of dignity, Chilton handed it to me. He shook his head at Danny.

"You are changed, Dick," he commented with a bitter smile.

"What they all tell me!" chirped Danny; and the scamp plumed himself with the complacence of one being congratulated upon his health; "but you know that's what you sent me away for, Harry—change!"

And Chilton blinked gloomily. I could guess his thoughts.

The message was from Drummond—dated New York.

Impossible. Your man could not be Castleman. He is dead.

Terse enough and sinister. But I read it aloud without special concern and exchanged a smile with Danny. We had learned from Chilton the day before that the scientist would sail this morning at ten.

My pal held the paper off admiringly.

"Well, now, of all the simon-pure imaginative *liars*—"

Uncle Alex coughed in the doorway.

"Yo' brekfus' all done dryin' up," he announced, gloomily; "an' Car'line got buckw'eet-cakes, too, dis mornin', an' hot sug'r-house m'lasses. She say—"

"Great Scott!" gasped Danny, tragically, "why *do* we linger here?"

He crushed the sheet into his pocket and laughingly waved us before him. So ended the incident of the telegram. And yet not quite, either, for, with breakfast over and Chilton gone, my young pal drew the message from his pocket and smoothed it on his knee.

"Poor fellow," he muttered; "poor old chap!"

Now I was surprised that in his voice was an unwonted emotion, a melancholy pity, that had no part with play-acting. Through the window for a moment his eyes roamed, and their light was misty and afar. And I sat silent, for it came to me that he was thinking of this poor youth's loss of the sunlit world out there; of his loss of life and love—his loss of *her*. It was like his generous way, and I thought no less of him for the feeling shown nor for the heaving sigh with which he slowly tore the paper into bits.

For that sigh, I knew, was the only requiem that the dead would ever know.

A moment later he was talking of Chilton, laughing at the man's surprise and discomfiture.

"Yet you gave him money," I said.

Danny looked glum. "*And* indorsed a note, Dominie. It seems to have been the regular thing." He shrugged. "Oh, I won't mind a touch now and then," he went on with the large air of recklessness of one with whom money goes easily because it comes easily, "but I'll be jiggered if I'm going to stand for the spoiling that guy has had from his cousin. Why, he's been a tyrant with his humors, that fellow. Can't you see that?" He grunted. "I just thought I'd show him that the worm had turned."

"You made that obvious," I commented, smiling.

Danny chuckled. "Did I? Well, I tried to," with a virtuous air. "It just came to me that here was the time to put our cousin where he belonged—

let him know what was coming to him hereafter. I'm glad if I made it plain."

"Don't worry," I said, dryly; "for you did." Then I reflected. "But, lad, is it wise to provoke him? Is it safe?"

"Safe!" scornfully. "Shucks! do you think we've anything to fear from him—*that* dub? Well, we haven't. Neither has she, now that—" He broke off, smiling at me oddly, eyes aslant. "Say, I've got something I want to show you." He led me to the old desk and opened it. "See here. Didn't you wonder why that guy was so keen to get into this the other day? Well, I did—I kept bothering to know what he was after; so yesterday, after the push left, I dug into it to see. Guess what I found."

"Another will!"—promptly.

Danny looked crestfallen. "You're some guesser; still, it's not *quite* that." From the desk he produced a memorandum-book of dark-green leather containing a penciled form of the will that the Judge had spoken of dictating to Castleman.

"It was with some of the stationery on which the will was written, half hidden by a package of these long blue envelopes. I guessed that he stuck it there just after he finished— Wait! wait!" as I exclaimed, wonderingly; "*that's* not all." Danny faced me, hands behind him. "I found what I think the pill-pusher was looking for—a pen-and-ink copy of the will. Looked like a first draft."

"No!" I breathed.

My pal smiled curiously as he extended a paper. I scanned it searchingly. Yes, it was evidently a

first draft, yet differing from the other document in failing to include for Chilton the ten thousand dollars in stocks.

"Except for that," I noted, excitedly, "an exact facsimile!"

"Think so?"

"Oh, perfect—every word, every curve—even the signature and its position."

My young pal coughed, then bowed low, fingers pressing his breast.

"You flatter me!" he murmured.

I stared, then looked at the sheet again.

"You mean— Danny, you *don't* mean—"

"*This*," extending another paper, "is Castleman's draft—the one I found; but you observe, reverend sir, that it is blotted and interlined, and, alas, unsigned!" The rogue relieved himself of a mock sigh. "Therefore it was necessary to supply the deficiency—h'm!—"

"Danny!"

"—also a long blue envelope!" and he produced it.

I turned it over with a relishing grin. Yes, his art had even supplied the same inscription: "Last will and testament of Richard Castleman."

"But why, lad—why?" Yet even as I asked the question I nodded understandingly, feeling oddly a relief, a gladness; knowing that it was for *her*—

"—just *in case* anything happened." So Danny seemed to read my thought. "Not that anything will," he amended, "for I believe we're safe as nails."

Up-stairs with me again, he sank into a chair, his smile complacent. "Yes, sir; it's a cinch—just as

you said it would be, that first night down there in the library. You had the long head, you old fox!" He raked a match for his cigarette and leaned back, his voice sobering with impressment. "Dominie, I believe there's nothing on earth can touch us—no power—nobody; there's not a *thing!*" Yet in the act of drawing at his light he paused, studying me with a frown. "Eh?"—sharply. "What's the matter? *Is* there anything?"

Then, as I was silent:

"Go on!—what is it you're thinking of? There's something! What is it?"—challengingly.

I looked at him, hesitating. Then my eyes fell.

"Nothing." And with that my lips closed.

"Oh, come off! There *is* something—or you think there is. Out with it, now!" He inhaled comfortably, copiously.

"Well," I drove, desperately, "I was just thinking, lad, of"—I swallowed heavily—"well—of conscience!"

"What?" gasped Danny, coughing with his smoke.

"Conscience!"

I eyed him moodily, yet feeling the blood surging to my ears.

One instant my pal stared at me blankly and with something of dismay; then he fell to choking in a tangle of smoke and laughter.

"You—you old rascal!" he wheezed, coming out of it. "Say, you had me going there for a second—honestly you did; you had me scared for fair. Why, that face!—who wouldn't be fooled? Say, stop it!"—gaspingly. "Conscience! That's a good one from

you. Oh, you make me *laugh!*" And again my young pal writhed joyously at what he seemed pleased to consider my sober facetiousness. Nor did he pause when a hollow knock sounded upon the door without.

"Come!"—chokingly.

An instant's fumbling pause, and Uncle Alex stood before us, announcement in his eye.

I arose, thinking Jean had come for me.

"Why, it's Dr. Chilton, Mister Dick, an'—"

"What, *again?*" Danny sobered, scowling.

"Yes, sir; an' he seems—*I* dun'no'—kinder flustered like." The old man's murmur was deprecatory—half apologetic. "He's got Mr. Stivers, de dep'ty sheriff, wid him, an' a n'r'r man—somebody I nuv'r see befo' in *dese* parts—an' dey say dey got ter see you right away—per-*tic*-u-lar, an'— *Good* lan', Mister Dick! Wha-what *am* de matter?"

XXIII

"WHO *ARE* YOU?"

"THIS man—what is he like?"

Danny's voice was coldly calm now. In the interval of that one lithe spring that had brought him to his feet, gripping his chair-back, he seemed to have got himself taut in rein.

"Why, 'tain't nobody 't *we* know, Mister Dick." The old man blinked reflectively at the ceiling. "Gen'man 'bout 's tall 's you is, I'd say—maybe a li'le stockier built; an' kinder well dressed. Man wid a beard an' wid one er dese yere kinder *hard*-lookin', hangin' jaws—sorter like a bloodhoun's—*you* know."

Danny did know, evidently, judging by the grim twist of his mouth—the recognition in his flash of eye.

"Blodgett!" looking at me. "I thought he'd be in at the death!"

Uncle Alex's breath sucked.

"My lan', Mister Dick, whose deff? *I* ain't heerd—"

"Nobody's, Uncle Alex, if I can help it!" Even then my young pal had the whim to chuckle. He

flashed a glance at his watch. "Look here"—sharply —"is Jeff around? . . . Good! Now listen to what I want you to do. Have Jeff get the car out and stop here under my balcony, so I—so I can speak to him. Under my balcony, now remember! and don't say a word to anybody! And hurry! *hurry!*"

"Yes, sir, I suah will!" and he turned about agitatedly; "'cause I know ef it's sump'n 'bout dis heah deff—"

"You've got it!"—Danny grinned, though wanly —"and tell those people down-stairs— Wait! let me think a minute!" His head came up with a toss of boyish impudence. "You tell them if they want to see me they may come up-stairs—and hustle about Jeff!" He pushed him by the arms.

"La, honey, *I* is—I's goin' straight 's I—"

But he was not going, for my young pal's clasp had slipped downward to the old negro's hand, which he cupped grippingly between his palms.

"Uncle Alex—" A smile softened his eyes; "Uncle Alex!" That was all; but slowly he patted the black, worn fingers; then gently released them.

Uncle Alex's eyes rolled above his steel-rimmed spectacles, then lighted—fun glinting. He snickered.

"G'long, Mister Dick—projickin' wid de ole nigger! Y' oughter be 'shamed!" But this time he went, the door closing upon his tickled glee.

"Danny! Danny!" I began, wildly. "What will—"

"Listen! The idea's this!"—he was tearing through drawers, stuffing trinketry into his pockets—"that iron balcony there—"

He jerked open the French windows, pointing to the strong, twisted cables of wistaria-vine, leering at me. I thought I understood, but I had no chance to speak. For now he was stuffing bills into my hand, his tongue crackling instructions as to where I should rejoin him, and admonitions—calculation for my safety.

"And don't be afraid! There's not a thing on you!"—scornfully; "they can't do a *thing!*" Then impressively: "Remember you met me traveling and I imposed upon you. Play to *that!*"

He lifted his hand.

"They're coming; I hear them on the stairs. Gee!"—swallowing—"I hope Jeff will hurry!"

"Listen, Danny lad!"—hurriedly—"is there anything I could tell any one—any message I could give?" I was thinking with terror that Jean might arrive before he could be gone—be witness of some humiliating scene.

His hand paused in the act of crowding a soft, gray cap into his pocket. All the fire faded suddenly from his face, leaving it spiritless—fallen.

"Dominie, you tell her—"

"This is the room!" The gruff voice without was Chilton's.

A stride, and my pal was at the door, twisting the old brass knob himself. He swung the portal open with a bow.

"*Don't* trouble knocking, gentlemen. Walk right in!" Danny smiled with unblushing effrontery. "Ah, Harry," cheerfully to the figure glooming upon the threshold, "how are we *this* time? Going to be

a pleasant day, don't you th— *Hel*-lo! Isn't that Mr.—a—Stivers?" He peered beyond into the shadows.

"I'm sorry to say it is, Mr. Castleman." The heavy, troubled voice belonged to a tall, raw-boned man, who advanced, buttressing Chilton's back. "I'm kinder afraid I'm troubling you about what's likely to turn out a fool's errand—leastways that's *my* opinion." His brows contracted at some one still withdrawn behind the jamb of the door. "I want to do my duty—still, I think people ought to be careful how they make arrests."

"*I* think so, too!" Indeed, the warmth of Danny's utterance advertised downright conviction on the subject. "Yes, sir, if they *must* make arrests—Harry! Harry!" with smiling, admonitory head-shake, "don't you see Mr. Stivers wants to come in? How *do* you think any one could manage to get by *you!* Just come in, Mr. Stivers, and"—his eye gleamed—"and bring your friend!"

Mr. Stivers's eyes flickered.

"He ain't no friend of mine—no, siree!—but he claims— Say!"—abruptly—"*you* go on in there and tell him what you told me!"

And into our midst he pushed a man—

The Squirrel!

Aye, the Squirrel, who by all the laws of consequence should be half-way on his way home to-day; the Squirrel, with face dark with its mat of neglected beard, but darker still with something of the proud and righteous defiance of one who knows he suffers wrong and outrage and still is strong with wrath.

It gave him a sort of dignity that lost nothing by being bolstered by clean linen and the neat suit of black-and-white check that had been among the contributions from Danny's store.

Now my young pal had drawn himself up with the air of one braced and tense—ready to meet calamity. But in the reaction of this surprise he stared a moment, wide-eyed, then leaned limply against the wall, laughing a little hysterically.

"*Well*, I'll be—jiggered!" His voice dropped weakly.

"Yes, sir," said Mr. Stivers, advancing, "we went over and scattered that nest of roadsters early yesterday morning. All of them hiked except this fellow, who got ugly—"

"Ugly!" snorted the Squirrel; "ugly, is it? An' wot about *you?* You didn't kill my dawg, did yuh?"

"We did kill his dog, but it was an accident"—and Mr. Stivers spoke regretfully, looking at Danny—"the dog got frightened and ran under our wheels." Yet it was this circumstance, it seemed, that had precipitated an encounter with the Squirrel. "That was how we found he was wearing a fine suit of clothes marked with your name. He said 'a man' *gave* it to him." The deputy's slow smile stood in lieu of any commentary by him upon the absurdity of such claim.

Chilton's grunt was equally expressive; his voice lifted, cutting in upon Danny as he was about to speak.

"I've often told my cousin, Mr. Stivers, that this place has no protection, run the way it is. Why, I

believe any tramp off the road out there could walk in here, take anything he liked, and these fool niggers wouldn't know the difference."

"Would *you?*"

The query seemed to escape my young pal impulsively, prompted, I knew, by his mocking spirit of mischief. He had been eying Dick's cousin from under his lashes, an ironic smile shaping about his mobile lips. But it was a question never replied to, for on the instant an indescribable sound from the Squirrel diverted attention that way. Yet his face as we turned showed itself expressionless as wood, except as it marked his impatience and disgust with the whole proceedings. His eyes ranged dully from my pal to me, in them no spark of recognition, no indication that he had ever seen either of us before. But his hand came up and lay against a point on his waistcoat, two fingers pressed inward against the palm. It meant "money" and conveyed that his funds were intact and undiscovered, secreted in the lining where Danny had advised.

"Ah!" and my lad chortled softly. "How do you *like* the suit?" he asked, pleasantly.

The Squirrel grinned. "It's a bird, gov'nor—a little close, but *I* 'ain't got no kick comin'!" His eye swept above me, pregnant with a wink.

Dr. Chilton coughed admonitively. "You don't mean you're going to give it to him, Dick!"

Danny shook his head, busying himself with a cigarette, whereupon Chilton snorted, seeming to supply comment upon the ridiculousness of his own question.

"No," said my pal, placidly; "you see, I *can't* give it to him; it's his already." He looked at the officer. "I gave him the suit myself, Mr. Stivers."

"Well, I'll be durned!" said Mr. Stivers. And though his eyes batted, the twinkle they turned upon the Squirrel showed humorous appreciation of the situation. Not so with Dick's cousin, who sputtered incredulously and scolded. It would seem that for the moment his disciplinary lesson of the morning had been forgotten.

But my pal was not attending to him. Two faint, staccato blasts of a motor horn had sounded under the window, and Danny was examining his watch reflectively.

"Do you happen to know, Mr. Stivers," he asked, "what time the next north-bound passenger-train leaves Nashville?"

"Yes, sir," promptly; "twelve-fifteen—local for Louisville." Yet he looked surprised at a question so apparently irrelevant.

"Why, Dick," exclaimed Chilton, "you're not going away?"

"No," said Danny; "but this man is. His mother is very low at his home in Ver—in Virginia." In the quick revision as to the state, I recognized his practised caution.

"Oh!" Mr. Stivers looked grave. "Well, now, I'm sorry, Mr. Castleman"—he spoke reluctantly, looking at the Squirrel—"but do you know I expect I— Well, I'm just afraid I can't let him go," slowly.

A gasp escaped the Squirrel.

Danny's chin stiffened with a little tilt.

"Why not?"

"Why, you see, it's this way"—the deputy's countenance hardened a little as he went on to explain—"I ain't sure, but I've an idea this is the chap that's wanted for a robbery over here at Madison last winter—Christmas night, it was—"

"Wot, *me?*" The amazed blast from the Squirrel's throat was supported by the consternation of his face. "Lor, Dan—*mister*, I wasn't down in these parts—I was in New York last Christmas!"—his eyes fixed Danny wildly—panicky in their appeal. "*Don't* let 'em job me! Why, *you*—" He pulled up, remembering in time, gripping his lips hard, just as I trembled for the revelation that seemed imminent. For it had been in New York that Danny had first found the Squirrel, collapsed upon a park bench, half starved and wholly in despair.

But now he dropped his head with a big doglike sigh.

"It's all right!" he muttered; "*I'm* all right. Never mind erbout me—*mister!*"

Now as he said this, and fell back, fingering his hat, relaxed and drooping, a pleased smile touched my young pal's mouth.

"Mr. Stivers," he said, "what makes you think this is the man? Do you identify him?"

"Well, no, sir," admitted the deputy, "I can't say *that!* But I did identify his dog."

"His dog!"

Mr. Stivers nodded. "You see, on the night of the robbery, as luck would have it, I happened along

just as Mr. Hollins was full tilt after a man he said had broken into his store. We didn't either of us ever come up with the fellow close enough to see him good, but his dog ran back to snap at us and we had a good look at him under an arc-light. As soon as I saw the little dog we ran over this morning I knew it was the same. Oh, I know dogs! I could swear to it! Then here comes this fellow at us, raising a rumpus for killing the dog—*his* dog, he says. So there you are!"

Danny's pleasant laugh held applause. "You're a regular detective, Mr. Stivers!" Then, as the deputy smirked: "Still, do you know I'm inclined to think this is a case of what you might call circumstantial evidence. I recollect this man telling us the other night about his dog—*you* remember, Dr. Blair!—and he said then that he had found it only a few days before."

Dr. Chilton's tongue clicked contemptuously.

"*He* told you!" His hollow laugh at Danny was a rattle of pitying scorn. As for the deputy, the shrewd, incredulous lighting of his eyes proclaimed his professional skepticism as to statements from a person under duress or suspicion.

"I'm sorry for him," he conceded, "if what he told you about his mother is true—for I reckon we all of us 've got mothers, or *have* had 'em! But of course I've got to do my duty, Mr. Castleman"—straightening; "you know that!"

He jerked his head beckoningly to the Squirrel.

"Come on!" he said, though not unkindly; "we've done been bothering this gentleman quite—"

"Wait!"

Now Danny was looking at his watch, but a little creasing rippled his forehead and his eyes seemed not upon the dial, but far away. And somehow as I looked at them they seemed to lead my thoughts to a far-off New England home—to a group and a white bed and a woman lying there; a woman old and worn and wan, but clutching close in her wasted fingers a yellow telegram. A woman holding on to life with the grim tenacity of love, waiting through another day and through another night for a last great joy that cometh in the morning.

And oddly the room got very still, so that I could clearly hear outside the drowsy pulsing of the car, waiting there beneath the balcony. Then Chilton's voice broke the spell, answering Uncle Alex, who had softly opened the door behind him, whispering.

"Telephone—for me?" He nodded to us. "I'll be back in just a minute!"

With his going Danny's head came up suddenly.

"Mr. Stivers, I'm glad my cousin has stepped out," he said, speaking quickly, "because he doesn't like me to interfere in matters of this sort. But your speaking of your duty makes me feel it's *my* duty to be frank with you; so I don't care what my cousin thinks—I'm going to tell you something."

"Yes, sir." Mr. Stivers looked interested, receptive.

"Well, I happen to *know* this isn't the man you think; that's all!"

The deputy smiled, but non-committally.

"I tell you I know it!" repeated Danny, insistently.

In the moment's pause I shifted nearer, giving my tongue a soft click, trying to catch my young pal's eye, guessing the mad thing that he contemplated. Then even as I started to speak—to get his attention, to somehow warn him from the step—I felt my tongue oddly palsied by some strange inhibition of will. And on the instant it came to me amazingly that I was *glad* he was going to do this very thing.

Going to? He *was* doing it; was already revealing his personal knowledge of the fact that the Squirrel could not have been in Tennessee the past Christmas, for the very good reason that he had been all of that day in New York City.

"The very day!" insisted Danny, with quiet conviction. "I know, because I was there and he did some work for me. I—er—had not yet sailed."

"Well, now, what do you know about that!" murmured Mr. Stivers. "You're *sure*, Mr. Castleman?" Yet it was easy to see that it was surprise, not incredulity, that he was wrestling with.

Danny smiled gravely and raised his hand.

"I'll make oath, Mr. Stivers." He spoke with the placid assurance of one who knew that he could do so without perjury.

"*No*, sir!"—the officer's head-shake was peremptory. "Your word's enough for me—*any* time! . . . Shucks! You needn't thank me; I'm the one to thank you—you've saved me from a blundering mistake and maybe saved the county a lot of expense." He nodded to the Squirrel with friendly eye. "You better be careful hereafter how you pick up stray dogs. Anyhow, I'm real glad you're out of trouble,

and I hope you'll get home and find your mother all right."

"T'anks!" The Squirrel grinned feebly, in his throat a click. But he turned to me with a question in his eyes as my pal followed the deputy out into the hall. I checked him warningly, for Mr. Stivers was indulging in some comments upon Danny's great change in appearance.

"Well, sir," he finished, "I'll just have to say I wouldn't have known you—I don't believe; not if I had met you down the pike there instead of in your own house. I never *saw* such a—"

"Going?" The stairs creaked under Chilton's ascending tread, and the Squirrel and I looked at each other disquietedly. "Why, where's your prisoner?"

"We-ell"—Mr. Stivers's chuckle was modest, as became an expenditure at his own expense—"you see, he ain't a prisoner no more. Your cousin here established an alibi for him. Why, he saw him and talked with him himself in New York City on Christmas Day."

"*What!*"

The doctor's outraged exclamation seemed suddenly to remind Mr. Stivers that he had put his foot in it.

"I—I— Well, good morning, gentlemen. I've got a lot to do!" and his feet pounded lightly down the stairway.

"*You* told him that? Why, what do you mean, Dick? You know you never saw that fellow in New York!"

"Oh yes, I did!" Danny's tone was a little sullen, as of a man at bay.

"But not Christmas. You *know* you never!" The old Chilton was in the saddle now, masterful and bullying. His voice lifted. "Why, you sailed on the last Saturday in November. I had a wireless from you out at sea. What did you want to *lie* about it for?"

"Want to do *what*, Harry?"

My young pal's tone had changed oddly. Gone was the sullen bluntness. In its place a polished suavity that made me think somehow of a rapier I once had seen—a slender Eastern blade, damascened and cold.

"You heard what I said!" Yet Chilton's sputter fell a little. And there came a pregnant pause.

Then Danny's velvet tones fell softly in the silence: "Did I? Then let us say I did—*not!*" An instant, and he added, measuredly, "Or if you must say it again, let it not be under my own roof!" Then, sweetly, "Do you get me?"

A chortle from the Squirrel drew my eye. The fellow was half doubled against the mantel, his back to me, but his arm fanning—pantomimic of joy.

I hissed at him, striving to overhear the rest of the colloquy in the hall. Chilton was saying something, but his voice was receding down the stairs.

The Squirrel turned, his face beetlike from the struggle with his congested emotions. He sidled toward me, leering.

"Lor! it sounds like old times! Talk erbout yer

stalls! Why, Danny— Say, I seen Danny oncet walk into de Waldrorf Astroria an'—"

Through the room Danny himself burst in a rush, swinging the door behind him, not stopping to close it with his hand. He jerked open the French windows, and with a stride was at the balcony's iron rail.

"Jeff!" sharply.

"Yes, sir!" from beneath.

My young pal leaned far over, giving some quick, low-voiced instructions whose purport I could not get. Then some warning crackled in his tones.

The negro boy's shrill treble answered protestingly:

"La, Mister Dick, *I* ain't! Nobody gwinter stop *me*—when you say not!"

Danny turned into the room again.

"Sharp's the word now, Squirrel! You want to go while the going's good!"

He swept him across the room, then with his hand upon the door, closed it to a narrow aperture, looking back at me.

"The pill-pusher has gone tumbling out the back way, trying to catch the deputy. He's sore as a pup because the guy whose crib was cracked is one of his star patients. So I don't know what he may try to put across—"

"Danny," I caught him up, "you don't think he suspects *you?*"

"Not in one thousand years!" A low-voiced scorn that had echo in the Squirrel's derisive laugh. "Now, *don't* you worry, Dominie"—with kindly impatience as he saw my nervous swallow; "I've

got Chilton buffaloed to a standstill! It would never enter his fool noddle that I'm not his cousin."

"*Naw!*" from the Squirrel in hoarse contempt. "Why, ain't Danny a dead-ringer fer de other bloke? —I mean de one dat's croaked. An' b'sides, ain't Danny de smoothest, slickest con man in—"

"Don't stop to gab, Squirrel!" He pulled his arm.

"*I* ain't, Danny"—humbly; "but wait a minute—I just wanter say one t'ing while—while I've kinder got de words!"

The words! Stammering and incoherent protestations of gratitude they were—crude and awkward phrasings that fell tumultuously, disjointedly, from the poor wastrel's tongue. Yet somehow they moved me, as I could see they moved my pal.

"It's all right, Squirrel!" and his hand fell kindly upon the other's shoulder. "Go home to your mother, and— Go back and live straight"—he waited, and then his voice fell solemn, like toll of distant bell—"*for her!*" He sighed. "Ah, Squirrel, *I* would if I had one!"

"*Would* you, Danny?" A great wonder—more than half incredulity—shone through the mist-veil of the outcast's eyes. "Lor!"

"Come, Squirrel!"

And the door, yielding to his jerk, yawned wide, leaving an opening through which they might have passed out abreast if so they had a mind—and yet hardly—not with that heavy, grim figure standing there!

No need to ask if he had heard too much. Aye, too much and quite enough! It was evidenced by the amazement in his face—amazement, though, that was yielding to understanding flashes in his eyes, showing rifts in the murky clouds of what had been till now a baffling mystery.

A stride, and he had swung the door behind him with a click, shouldering his lumpish bulk against the panels, glooming fatefully at my pal from the ambush of his heavy frowning brows.

"Who *are* you?" he growled, like beast athwart the way.

XXIV

A POLICE CALL

A BOLT from the blue usually has with it at least one mitigating blessing—it clarifies the air.

I knew the game was up.

Moreover, the chance to retire with dignity was gone now beyond recovery. We could expect to be flung out now like the interloping vagabonds we were.

Well, did *I* care?

Aye, it would seem so, for I felt my face and brow mantling with the hot incarnadining dye of shame.

"Say, buck up!" The Squirrel had slid catlike to my shoulder and was whispering hoarse scorn behind his lip. "*Don't* yuh know Danny yet?"

It would seem I did not; for he was standing there slightly inclined toward Chilton, as cool and debonair as a lily of the field. Indeed, I could have sworn that behind the veil of polite concern was a whimsical relish for the situation—a humorous appreciation of the comedy element it held at our expense.

His laugh broke upon the pause—a short laugh, amused and tolerant.

"Who *am* I! Why, what in the world do you mean?"

Chilton scowled. This and his swallow served as answer, but his lips quivered as though he were trying to summon—to select words to meet the occasion. His eyes were recessed like a man's whose wits were on the defensive, fighting a subtler mind.

"You—you know what I mean!"

Danny looked at him, the ghost of a smile haunting his mouth corner. Then with lips parted he turned blankly toward me, as though asking me to witness his profound—his obstupefying amazement.

"Wh-y, *Harry!*" Danny's gentle, surprised inflection, accompanied as it was by a slow admonitory head-shake, suggested mild reproof for the paroxysm of a tempestuous child. "Why, I'm *surprised!*"

Dr. Chilton's snorting laugh seemed to imply that if there was anybody experiencing surprise it was himself. Also it proclaimed determinedly and finally and once for all the vain futility of further subterfuge with *him*.

"Speak up!" he snapped. "Who are you?"

Danny shrugged and relaxed, hands in pockets.

"Search me!" he said, with unabashed impudence; "all I know is what I've been told!" He backed to the table and sat upon its edge, swinging his foot.

Dick's cousin choked.

"*You* impostor!"

The explosion seemed to unlock for him the floodgates of pent-up expression. He released upon my lad a deluge of abusive characterization, pausing

only when his breath and resources seemed alike exhausted.

My young pal nodded amiably and with something of an air of critical appreciation.

"Not bad! not bad at all!" he pronounced, cheerfully. "I tell you, Harry, old top, you've got a book of synonyms backed clean off the shelf! Don't believe you left out *anything*, except"—regretfully—"those two good old reliables, 'charlatan' and 'mountebank.' Somehow" — gloomily — "nobody ever does think of those."

Chilton ignored the persiflage. "I felt something was wrong about you all the time," he fumed. "I might have known you couldn't be Dick, if—if—Oh, I was just a *fool*, that's all!"

"Um-m!" Danny's concerned murmur, though polite, seemed a concession that the conclusion reached really was the true solution of the whole matter. "Oh, well, Harry—"

"For *one* thing" — congestedly — "Dick never called me 'Harry' in his whole life!"

"Oh!" And my young pal did look a little taken aback. "Well, then, *Doctor*, as I—"

"He called me 'Hal,'" snapped Chilton, glaring contempt.

"Well, well!"—soothingly—"*I*'ll call you 'Hal'; *I* don't mind." The twinkle of his eye was but the spark needed to set off the Squirrel's rude guffaw. "Why, hello, Squirrel! Are *you* still here? Um! this won't do at all," and out came his watch. "I've found this an excellent timepiece since I've been handling it, and—now let me see. Yes, you have

loads and loads of time; but I think, Squirrel, all things considered, that it would be best for you to get to the station; so—"

He slipped from the table, looking smilingly, politely, from the door itself to its grim sentinel.

"Pardon me, Harry—I mean, Hal; but if you don't mind—"

It would seem he did mind. His hand slipped behind him and the big old-fashioned key shrieked querulously in the lock. Without a word, Dick's cousin dropped it in his deepest pocket, buttoning his coat.

The Squirrel rumbled scorn. He looked at Danny as a mastiff might, waiting his master's word.

"Shall I go through him, Danny?"—eagerly. "You just say de word!"

His great knuckles cracked as he pulled at them. Then his shoulders dropped forward, his arms hanging straight like something anthropoidal, menacing.

"Squirrel!"—sharply.

The crackling rebuke brought the man upstanding.

"What did you promise me?" sternly. Danny's eyes flashed.

The Squirrel swallowed, his head down.

"Dat I wouldn't nev'r do no strong-arm work," he mumbled. "I forgot, Danny." His eyes lifted, humbly, craving pardon.

Danny nodded kindly, then faced Chilton.

"Doctor, this man has just time to reach a mother who is perhaps dying," he stated, gravely. "Will you let him pass?"

Chilton's tongue clicked. His lip compression expressed contempt for such a question.

Danny tried again. "He has had nothing whatever to do with the responsibility for my imposture," he said, speaking earnestly; "nor for the robbery of your friend's store. I give you my word of honor."

"*Your*—" The doctor all but laughed. "He will pass out—to go to jail—when an officer comes." Then, grimly, "I have just instructed Alex to send Jeff after Mr. Stivers."

"Jeff?" said Danny. He stepped quickly out through the French windows to the balcony, looking over. What he saw seemed to satisfy him, for he came back with a quiet smile at me. "*Mais, Richelieu est cependant le roi!*" he quoted, enigmatically.

Then he walked over to the guardian of the portal.

"Doctor, just a word." And now there was no badinage in the lad's low tone, but deep gravity—withal, courtesy. "Just now I gave you an opportunity, a chance to do a decent thing—and you didn't take it." He paused a moment. "Before I'm through, I'll give you another chance—no, not about him," looking at the Squirrel; "the chance I refer to will be about another matter." He waited an instant, then added in a tone slowly, solemnly vibrant, but so low I could scarcely hear: "When it comes, see that you rise to it; for if it passes, it can come again—no more!"

He wheeled on heel. "Squirrel!"

"Yes, Danny."

"Look out of the window there—that balcony. . . . Do you see what's there?" Then, as the other leered back understandingly, my pal turned whim-

sically to the man at the door. "The 'Squirrel' acquired his professional 'moniker' as the best porch-climber in America," he explained, brazenly. "Ordinarily he prefers a vine to a stairway. . . . Over you go, Squirrel—and good luck! Jeff will know what to do."

"So long, Danny!" with a wave. "I—"

"*Wait* there! Listen!" Dr. Chilton's cry was hoarse, muffled by excitement and anger. He strode across the room, his arm lifted to stay the wanderer. "If you'll stay here and tell what you know about this man, the robbery charge shall be withdrawn. I guarantee it; and what's more, I—I'll give you a hundred dollars!"

Danny chortled smilingly, rubbing his hands.

"Pshaw! Make him cough up more than *that*, Squirrel," he laughed. "He can come again many times over; that is"—maliciously—"if he cashes in the note I indorsed for him this morning." Then, as the hectored man sent him a livid glance, he dropped into the cadence of the auctioneer. "One hundred dollars is offered for me, gentlemen—one hundred dollars! Will no one make it a hundred and five? Do I hear— What! *Must* you go, Squirrel? Well—"

"A thousand dollars!" shouted Chilton; "and within the hour!"

The Squirrel glared hideously at him, eyes afire.

"Go and eat coke!" he snarled, then flashed a glance at me and Danny.

"Pals first!" he cried, and seemed to throw himself in air.

But I saw the quiver of the old wistaria-vine; I heard Jeff's mellow laugh below. I heard a roar, a whir, that swelled defiant above Chilton's vain bawling at the negro boy—then silence lay outside.

But in the room tempest raged.

Dr. Chilton, storming breathless abuse and threats, was expending undignified efforts to force the door his own hand had lately closed to liberty. He had unlocked it, but it was held fast in the mightier grip of the bolt my pal had shot—a great, flat bar of iron; some relic, doubtless, of turbulent days long gone.

"Are they out into the Nashville road yet, Dominie?"

And, looking, I said they were. But I was about to add that they were moving north instead of toward Nashville, when his warning grimace checked me. And then I knew that the Squirrel was traveling in accordance with design—toward some town above, through which his train would pass.

"*All* right, Doctor!"

And now Chilton, cursing him, tore through the opened portal, while Danny, smiling, lingered at the glass a moment to critically adjust his tie.

"Danny lad—"

"Just sit tight, old man," he answered me over his shoulder; "the cards are not all on the table yet." He turned with shining eyes. "Oh, Dominie! Dominie! I'm having the time of my life!" He drew my arm. "Come on; I think I hear our late cousin at the telephone."

I moistened my lips. "Danny lad, what will he—To whom is he telephoning?" I faltered.

"The police, I think"—tranquilly; and he paused to light a cigarette.

Down-stairs, as we reached the hall, Dick's cousin was storming into the mouthpiece of the library telephone, addressing some one as lieutenant, trying to make intelligible some incoherent commands intended to apprehend the Squirrel at the Union Station.

Danny leaned against the door-frame, pleasantly attentive.

"And ask the lieutenant," his voice broke in, "if he will kindly recommend a good 'dick'—I mean detective, who can look into the matter of a valuable document that's been destroyed—a will!"

Crash fell the receiver with the hand that held it, striking upon a copper ash-tray, ringing it discordantly. The doctor's bald head turned slowly toward us, but not his crouched shoulders.

"What's that?" He swallowed. "What you mean?"

Danny flicked his ash. "Why, we'll explain it all—when the detective comes"—graciously. "Go on," with a nod at the instrument; "call him up—if you can."

But he could not. Indeed, his trembling, flabby hand could not lift the receiver to its hook. He essayed and failed.

"Do you mean to say that *I* destroyed a will?"—blusteringly.

My young pal looked downward, smoothing his lips.

"Maybe you *did*," he said.

A pause, and the doctor laughed harshly, "'Maybe I *did*,'" he mimicked, "but you'll have a mighty hard time making any one believe that about *me*, young man."

Danny's glance lifted. "Why, who are *you?*"—innocently.

"Who am I?"—blusteringly. "I'm Dr. H. M. Chilton, sir; that's who I am; and—"

A loud, incredulous crackle from the fallen receiver answered him; and my young pal moved into the hall, laying his head against the wall. He shook, wordlessly.

"Oh, this good old world," he panted, presently; "this good old—good old world!"

XXV

DANNY'S COUP

FIVE minutes later a struggle was waging in the library.

I paced the hall outside in a fever of apprehension, striving to catch fragments of the angry talk—angry, at least upon Dr. Chilton's part. From my young pal came only now and then a murmur—varied at intervals by his reckless laugh and once or twice an ejaculation of surprise.

All I could tell was that Dr. Chilton's tardy memory was now summoning various damning particulars that he stormily asserted ought to have revealed to him offhand that Danny was a clever adventurer. He showed that my pal's likeness to the master of Winnicrest was no more pronounced than his unlikeness. Yet I knew that this was clear to him now only as it would be clear to any one having the key to a masquerade. After all, it was but accident that had given Dr. Chilton his key. Without it, that which he so contemptuously described as "betraying blunders" would not have been so soon apparent; the designation "clumsy bungler" might have been indefinitely deferred.

Poor Danny! Well, I knew how this last scornful implication must have cleft his armor—pricked him on the raw.

Once I tried to distinguish what I thought was a reference to the will; but I could not get it clearly. Was the doctor still defiantly intrenched there? or had he taken Danny's reference to be but a bluff—a random arrow, shot blindly in the dark?

I wondered.

Meantime, the five minutes stretched to ten—to fifteen. It seemed an hour!

I felt that I could stand the suspense no longer.

Forbidden by Danny to be present at the conflict, "lest Chilton insult me," I now bethought me suddenly of the little study at the end of the library and from which I had conned the apartment once before. Forthwith into the darkened room I glided upon my toes, finding with joy that the communicating door was sufficiently ajar for me to command the room beyond.

Dr. Chilton had his back to me. He was standing beneath the portrait of Castleman's soldier grandfather, angrily declaiming at Danny, who reclined in his favorite chair, eying the speaker sidewise and with a slight shade of annoyance between his brows.

"I don't get you," he interrupted. "Why shouldn't I have said that the dog knew me—was so glad to see me? Why was there any break about that?"

"Why!" mocked the doctor. "Why, you clumsy trickster, Dick Castleman never saw Argus in his life!"

"Never *saw*—his own dog? Oh, come off!"

"Never saw Argus—no, sir!"—emphatically. "The dog was received here—a present, at Christmas—nearly a month after my cousin had left."

"Oh!" Danny looked down, frowning.

Chilton's throat rattled. "I *thought* it funny—your saying that the dog nearly ate you up."

"Well, he did"—dryly—"or tried to." Then, abruptly: "Here, give me this: what was the matter with my saying that Miss Logan was going down to show Dr. Blair the 'Hermitage,' near here—General Jackson's home?" and Danny looked frankly curious.

Chilton grunted. "Nothing, you fool; only you referred to him as 'a hero of the Confederacy.' He wasn't."

"What's *that?*" Danny's eyes fired and his arms half-lifted him from his chair. "*You* say that, and you call yourself a Southern man?" He eyed him with scorn. "Why, you big yellow mutt, the South never had a braver champion than General Stonewall Jackson! I know *that* much!"

Dr. Chilton's laugh was hollow.

"If you 'knew' a little more," he answered, bitingly, "you would know that General Stonewall Jackson is buried in Virginia. The 'Hermitage' is the home of General—of President Andrew Jackson. He had been buried out there in his grave long years—half a generation, about—before the Confederacy came."

He waited cruelly through the moment in which my young pal sank slowly back, obviously crestfallen, then he added, chillingly:

"My cousin worshiped his memory—collected everything he could about him; gloried in telling everybody that his great-grandfather and the General used to race their horses against each other over here at Clover Bottom on Stone's River. Why, Dick named his horse after the General's own favorite. . . . Do *you* know what that name was?"

Evidently Danny didn't. He shifted impatiently. "Never mind; we'll omit the family history," he answered, a little sullenly. "There's just one more thing, though, that I'm curious about. *You* say I made a 'fool answer' when the Judge asked me a question yesterday: where was Truxton?"

"You certainly did," contemptuously; "you betrayed yourself. Only, I thought you were joking; so did the Judge. You said Truxton was in Arizona."

Danny leaned forward, centering upon him a stare that, while it was of somber calm, was nevertheless perplexed.

"Exactly!" Then, with a sigh: "Oh, all right—go to it! What's the answer? But look here," he quickened, sharply, "I *know* Truxton! I came through there from Cal— I mean I've been there."

Dr. Chilton's reply was delivered measuredly, pityingly:

"Truxton," he said, "is the name of the horse!"

"*Horse!*" Danny grimaced incredulously; then of a sudden fell backward, throwing up his hands. "You score!" and my pal laughed — a little stridently. Then he sat forward again, an odd lighting

in his eyes "Say, what *was* the right answer to the question—I mean where *is* the horse?"

Dr. Chilton stiffened, clearing his throat. "I will answer that one question for you, and then I am done. *I* have my cousin's horse."

"I knew it!" and Danny's laugh pitched. "Yes, sir, if I had known it was anything movable—anything not nailed down, I could have guessed *that!* You have his overcoat; you have his golf-sticks—so Alex tells me; and you had his car; you *tried* to get his girl—and couldn't!" My lad's voice sharpened a little, edged sternly. "As if a girl like that would look at a toad like you, anyway! . . . Now, you shut up!"—with abrupt asperity. "*I* want to talk awhile. . . . You dart about like a fat spider till you are sure your cousin—poor trusting fly!—is dead, then you come here bullying faithful old family servants, one wrinkled finger of either one of whom, I'll bet, would have been more to Castleman than all of your dirty body. *You* come here, lording it as master!"

Chilton quivered. "You insolent ruffian!"—chokingly—"you'll find out who's master here before you're—"

"Right-o! for *I* am master here!"

It rang exultantly from Danny's throat, bringing him to his feet, his head erected high, his eyes ablaze with haughty fire. His nostrils swelled; he seemed to fill the room.

So, in the cabin of some captured galleon, might have towered Sir Wilfred Rowland, the bucaneer ancestor of whom it was his wont to boast.

His arm was leveled at a deep arm-chair. "Sit down!"—shortly.

Then, as Dr. Chilton hesitated, my young pal advanced a stride. "Take it!" he said in low, compressed tone, "or, by the Lord Harry, I'll throw you into it! . . . There! . . . Now you listen to what *I* have to say!"

And Chilton listened.

He heard the story of the crime that had reduced the holographic will to ashes; that had filched from the dead man's sweetheart the heritage provided by his love.

At the end, he was even allowed to see the half-charred scraps of paper Danny carried in his purse.

"*You* talk of bungling!" and Danny laughed.

I saw Dick's cousin wipe his lips; I saw the red tide engulf his ears, then leave them white again. Of a sudden he shook himself, doglike, and sat up in his chair.

"And what," he enunciated, with a little edge, "is all this pack of lies to me?"

"Lies?" Danny eyed him with a slow smile that widened to a grin. "Say, Harry—I mean Hal—you sure can throw some stall! . . . Go on"—chuckling—"let's have the bluff. What is it?" His mocking eyes teased.

But Dr. Chilton eyed him collectedly.

"I know of no will, sir, that has been destroyed."

Danny sat down slowly, smoothing his lips.

"I get you!"—thoughtfully, and his brows contracted a little dubiously at the fragments in his

hand. "Say, Harry—I mean Hal—you're not such a lollop, after all!"

The doctor made no reply. His fingers drummed on the chair-arm; he looked toward the door and seemed on the point of rising.

Danny considered him pleasantly—it seemed understandingly.

"What gets me, though," he said, hitching his chair nearer, "is how you're going to get away with the bunk you told the Judge the other day. I mean about the will. You will remember"—blandly—"that after elaborately establishing for the Judge the fact of the document's existence, you told of taking it away—of locking it in your own safe." At this point my young pal was constrained to refresh himself with a cigarette. "I presume"—suavely—"it is still there."

Dr. Chilton shook his head.

"No," he said; "not now."

"Um-m!" Danny's murmur was unimpeachably sympathetic. "Lost, I suppose, eh?" His brows lifted delicately. "Burglars, maybe!" He inhaled relishly, eyes half closed.

"No." Dick's cousin's eyes roamed the walls—to the portrait overhead. "I returned it here—to *you!*"

Two long cones of white smoke shot from Danny's nostrils ere he opened his eyes. He began to laugh, choking with it.

"Harry—I mean Hal," he said, "if I could bring myself to shake hands with you, I'd do it! Say, you *have* got a future."

The doctor ignored the comment; but he stood up, slowly buttoning his long frock. Then he consulted his watch.

He addressed Danny with calm: "Now, I will give you and your fellow-rogue just one-half hour to get off the premises. . . . Otherwise, it is arrest for conspiracy with intent to defraud—and for felony."

"Felony?" Danny, still reclining, angled his head a little quizzically. "What felony?"

And Chilton launched his bolt:

"The destruction of my cousin's will, of which you yourself admitted knowledge!" He spoke deliberately, affecting a righteous inflection of indignation.

My lad stared, then blinked. His feet seemed to slip from him along the floor and he slumped at full-length in his chair.

"Well, will somebody—" He looked up at the doctor, his face contracted with concern. "Look here, Doctor, let me tell you something. You're wasting yourself in *your* profession! Why, with your—"

"You have half an hour," he was reminded, coldly.

Danny sat up, smiling impishly.

"Gee!" he said, "but I'm glad now I didn't destroy that will!"

Dr. Chilton frowned, gesturing toward the door.

And Danny got up. But he moved across to the old iron safe in the corner, dropping on his knee, his fingers working rapidly. The doctor followed him, an odd evidence of uneasiness in his bearing.

"Yes, sir, I had forgotten you gave it back to me.

Let me see"—pausing to leer at Chilton—"was that this morning or yesterday? . . . *Ah!*"

He stood up, holding in his hand a long, blue envelope. He displayed it, showing the inscription.

Chilton caught at it—missed it.

"What do you— Why, what nonsense is this?" —harshly.

Danny's eyes lifted innocently.

"The will you 'returned' to me. Don't you remember?" He withdrew the paper from its envelope, and I marked the deliberation with which he opened it, allowing the other full opportunity to scrutinize even its folding. He spread it before Chilton's eyes, keeping the safe between as protection from his reach.

The doctor craned closely; looked up suddenly, piercingly, at my young pal, then stooped to peer again at what he held.

And there was silence.

Of a sudden Danny ducked, fishing from the safe a package of what I recognized as canceled checks. Chilton caught them from his extended hand, tearing off the rubber, running them over slowly, his eyes glancing between them and the signature upon the "will," searchingly comparing.

Again he bored a long glance at Danny.

"You"—the slips dropped from his fingers—"you are *not* Dick?" huskily. The man rested heavily upon the big safe.

My pal smiled, giving him time to think.

"I expect," he said, pleasantly, "that we would better—er—leave it that way. *Don't* you think so?"

Chilton started to speak, then tripped—deliberating, it seemed.

"Mister Dick!" Uncle Alex's voice sounded close to the panels of the door. "Heah comes Miss Jean down de pike—de Judge, too."

Danny considered Chilton reflectively.

"Don't you think," he said, poising the blue envelope in his hand, "that I would better let the Judge have this now—er—as Miss Logan's guardian?"

Dick's cousin swallowed heavily.

"Safety first," smiled my pal, "*you* understand!"

It would seem that Chilton did. He eyed him dully, yet fearfully.

"It—I think it's safe enough—here," he faltered. Then, as Danny still waited, "I mean with—with you and your friend in the house," he gulped, "er—all the time."

"Um!" Danny eyed him narrowly and with an element of undisguised contempt. "Let me see," and he cocked his ear at attention, "*what* was it you called me just then?"

And this time the other did not trip.

"'Dick,'" he answered, and looked him in the eye.

Danny smiled as he clicked the bolts upon his handiwork; a smile, I knew, that was summoned by Jean's mellow laugh outside.

"I think, my dear Harry—I mean Hal—that you would better go—for to-day." He stood up, hands withdrawn into his pockets, nodding him careless dismissal. "*So* long!"—turning.

And Dick's cousin went.

XXVI

DANNY PUTS HIS FOOT IN IT

JEAN—but with her uncle in his car, instead of in her little electric. Noting this, my spirits sank disappointedly. It meant to me that to-day we would not ride together nor talk of Marjorie.

Moreover, I had wanted to plumb her heart about Danny—to learn the truth for myself and in my own way. Like a drowning man grasping straws, I had clutched at Danny's persuasion that it made a world of difference if this girl's memory of her old sweetheart was really being submerged in her love for the new. It meant much to me to know if this were true. But now my distraught soul must wait; must strive and toss another day—another night.

And just then she turned from Danny and faced me with her smile.

"You're going with me to-day," nodding with pretty imperiousness. Then to Danny: "Auntie says she never got twelve words with Dr. Blair the other night; and she wants to tell him about the altar-cloth that Queen Victoria gave the Advent Church in Nashville."

"Fine!" crooned my young pal. "I'll run you both over in the car—after a while."

For Jeff had not yet returned.

The Judge snorted. "You'll do nothing of the sort, sir! You're going right in town with me—no more procrastination; we're due right now at a business luncheon, and I promised to bring you!" He snapped open his watch. "We must hurry, Dick"—turning.

An instant's start in Danny's face, a half-perturbed, half-quizzical glance at me, and then his assurance rallied.

"All right, sir." Then to Jean, "I'll have Jeff drive you back—er—presently."

But this proposal, too, was unwelcomed; indeed, was rejected with scorn. We were going to walk, Jean declared, firmly.

"Walk!" gasped Danny, incredulously. Then as she nodded brightly he burst into derisive, concerned protest. "Why, you're crazy!" he pronounced in tender panic, and his glance embraced her dainty pumps with consternation. "Nearly four miles and in all this dust! *No*, sir—"

"Why, Dick!" The girl's eyes widened at him with surprise. "What are you talking about? It isn't a mile to Holly Court by the old road through the woods!"

Danny blinked. "Oh yes," he said, hastily, "the old road. I had forgotten it!" And the boy showed it.

A little piqued contraction puckered Jean's forehead.

"Had you, indeed, sir!" and with a tilt of chin she turned her shoulder upon him.

It was a short cut to Holly Court, she explained to me. She was so glad now that she had thought of showing it to me, especially as Dick had forgotten it — this with a withering sweep of her lashes at the culprit. A beautiful walk this time of year, she said; and she had thought that if we went leisurely—took our time—perhaps I might enjoy it.

Behind her shoulder Danny's eyes flashed me a glance, half sympathetic, half mischievously cynical, as I feelingly murmured my pleasure. He could, of course, have no idea that my words chimed with my inclination.

"We must get off, Dick," urged the Judge, crisply; and he took our hats from Uncle Alex. And we moved out, Danny bending to Jean, trying to make his peace, I knew, and trying not in vain. For the something he whispered, the smile she flashed him was divine.

"Anyhow," he chirped, wistfully, "we'll all go as far as the gate together."

A stare, and Jean's laugh trilled birdlike.

"Uncle, did you hear that? He *has* forgotten that the old road leads from the Victor's Gate!"

But Danny caught himself like a falling cat.

"Forgotten!" indignantly. "Nothing of the sort! I'm talking about the—er—about *that* gate." His glance brushed the Judge, who was discussing with his chauffeur a softened tire. "I mean I'm going along and open it for you."

Her smile faded to something like frightened gravity. It seemed to me her eyes looked hurt.

"Oh, Dick—no!" she murmured, half aside, with a little catch of breath. "You wouldn't do that," reproachfully; "you mustn't!"

And suddenly there fell an odd silence there upon the old porch steps. I became aware that the Judge, neglecting the tire and the chauffeur, was looking up at Danny with contracted brow. But my pal did not see; neither did he see, as I did, the shocked amaze in the face of the old servitor in the doorway.

"I know you're joking about the gate, Dick," and the girl's tone was low and almost pleading. "*You* couldn't open it, you know."

"What!" My young pal's laughing eyes questioned her seriousness. He doubled his arm, holding the muscles toward her significantly. "Say, will you just forget how I *used* to be and—"

Uncle Alex's growl interrupted.

"It 'u'd take er heap more'n any muscle ter turn dat key," he rumbled, gloomily, "an' I ain't suah whar it is, nohow—but I *t'ink* it in de li'le drawer in ole Miss's desk just whar she put it. Car'line knows." His saffron eyeballs blinked at Danny sadly.

The Judge also looked sober.

"It isn't a key you need so much," he remarked, shortly, "as an ax and a crowbar. Why, man, are you forgetting that the Victor's Gate has been closed for over fifty years?"

"Oh!" said Danny, vaguely, and looked at me, a sudden intelligence in his eyes. But I had already guessed that the gate they were discussing was the

one through which we had had our first glimpse of Winnicrest.

The old Judge looked at his niece, staring at Danny with wordless reproach in her soft eyes, then at the old negro's troubled visage. He cleared his throat gravely.

"I'd think twice before I ever opened the Victor's Gate, my boy," he admonished, kindly. "Those who love you don't even like you to jest about it—it isn't like you, and—"

His smile, warmly affectionate, filled out the sentence better than could words.

Before his clear eye Danny colored, his glance cutting me a little wildly.

"I wasn't in earnest, sir, of course," he protested with a contriteness that I guessed Jean's attitude was more than responsible for. "I just—I—"

"Don't!" uttered the girl, impulsively, in lowered tone, and touched his sleeve. She smiled as he looked down at her. "I thought you were going to say you 'forgot.' Don't, dear," whisperingly; "I don't like it—even for you to say it!"

"*I* 'ain't forgot!" Aunt Caroline's turban appeared in the doorway behind Uncle Alex. "I bet you I ain't nuv'r goin' ter fergit, nuther!" Upon the pause the old woman's tone struck musically, like the drone of a heavy viol. "La! I 'member jus' as well de mornin'—jus' laik dis—dat Marse Richard an' de udder young gem'mens rid out tru dat big gate! My! dey all looked so peart in dey new gray uniforms an' wid de brass all a-shinin' like gold. We niggers all say ter one 'nuther it won't be more'n

a week 'fo' Marse Richard whip all dem Yankees off de face ob de earth an' come home. An' den ole Miss—she *wa'n't* old"—this to me—"not no older 'n Miss Jean here—she swing de gate shut an' lock it; an' she tell Marse Richard it ain't nuv'r gwine ter be opened till—till— *You* tell him w'at she say, Alex?"

"Till de victor comes home to Winnicrest," said the old negro to me.

"Dat it! Dem de ve'y words!" and the turban nodded, then shook with melancholy waving. "But dey ain't no victrer nuv'r come home to Winnicrest. Bime-by de Yankees come, but ole Miss she nuv'r open de gate—an' dey don't git it open, 'cause it mighty strong. Only, one morning, a passel uv low-down forigin' soljers dey come wid one er dem big blue guv'ment waggins, an' dey ain't a mind ter go roun' ter de udder gate laik ole Miss ax 'um polite. *No*, sir, dey jus' fetch a log an' balance it an' dey say dey bus' dat lock all ter flinders. But dey didn't!" Aunt Caroline's bosom heaved with a deep breath and her eyes flashed, coal-like. "No, sir, my young mistis she jus' reach tru an' put her han's ober dat lock an' she defy 'um. Dey go on scand'lus an' threat'n, but dey don't tech her an' dey don't do *nuthin'*. An' jus' den up comes a horse, lickety-clip, wid one er dem blue Yankee off'sirs all white wid dust, an' my young mistis tell him 'bout de gate. She say, 'Ain't it ernuf you done broke my heart widout havin' to break dis lock?' Den dat young man, wid his horse jus' cuttin' didoes, he take off his cap an' ax jus' ez perlite ef

he hav' de honor uv addressin' de wife of Colonel Castleman. An' w'en she say yes he say fer her not ter worry no more; he see dey ain't nobody gwine tech dat gate nuv'r no more or he know de reason why! An' he say he 'shamed fer de way his men do; an' he sen' dat waggin kitin' down de pike. Den w'en she t'ank him so sweet, her eyes a-shinin', he say, solemn, 'Madam, dere's a wife, one ez young and brave ez you, who watches a gate fer me up dere in ol' Ohio!' An' wid dat he sweep his cap mos' down ter de fetlock uv dat prancin' horse an' he say, p'int'n' after de waggin an' den lookin' at her right close, 'Lady, in yo' horizons r'memb'r all my sins!' *I* dun'no'—maybe dat wa'n't it perzackly, but it *sump'n* laik dat; an' den he spin roun' an' scamper down dat pike laik mad. But my young mistis she call after him, 'Dey's all fergiv'n, sir!' she say; 'an' may God bring you home ag'in ter *her!*' An' I t'ink he heah, dat young Yankee off'sir, jus' ez he swing roun' de turn uv de road, fer he raise up in his sterrups quick an' smile an' wave his dusty cap at her. An' dat de las' time we eber see him any moah; but it de las' time, too, we eber see anybody in dis worl' dat try ter open de Victrer's Gate!"

The wheeze of the pump and the low matter-of-fact colloquy of master and man over the stiffening tire broke oddly on the silence as she ended, summoning Uncle Alex with her for some duty in the rear. For the moment the Judge seemed to have forgotten the young people, as they had forgotten me.

"You see!" With gentle archness the girl smiled

up at Danny. "Even an enemy wouldn't open the Victor's Gate!"

A flush tinged my young pal's face, then left it pale. His glance touched her face distressfully, then lighted wanly from her smile. With a gesture the boy drew her behind one of the great fluted pillars.

"'Nymph,'" I heard him chortle with tender gaiety, "'in thy orisons be all my sins remembered!'"

And forthwith she answered him as the mistress of Winnicrest had answered her foe in that morning of long ago:

"They're all forgiven, sir!"

All? I shook my head, smiling for the pity of the little comedy. Oh, Jean! Jean! what woman ever knows when she's forgiving all!

"Now, then, young man, if you're ready!" called the Judge. "What's that? No, sir," with emphasis, "you *haven't* time to go and help them over the fence! Come on, Dick," quickening restively, "we really must get to town. You know the examiner is leaving at one."

"Examiner!" My pal's foot, half lifted to the step, fell back. I saw his complacence drop from him like a mask.

The Judge glared surprise.

"Yes, sir, examiner—the bank examiner," with crisp impatience. "Didn't I tell you yesterday that Winterburn was in town?"

But with the name Danny's face cleared.

"Oh yes," he chirped, "he *is* the examiner, isn't he? I mean," floundering under the Judge's sardonic eye, "of course he is! Oh yes, I remember!"

The old lawyer muttered, pushing him into the car.

Jean's laugh caroled mockingly.

"Do you believe that, uncle? *I* don't!" scornfully; "but I honestly *do* believe"—with affected concern—"that Dick's mind is tottering! Haven't you noticed it, Dr. Blair?" Then as I nodded smilingly: "No, uncle, poor Dick just didn't remember what a bank examiner was. Did you now, Dick?" sweetly.

Danny looked full at me, then at her, his mouth corner twisting in a shadowy smile. But it would seem that for once his glibness failed. And I understood. I knew that the word "examiner" had been to Danny like the disconcerting prick of a rapier through a trusted corselet of steel. He was shaken more than he revealed.

The Judge grunted, settling backward in the cushions.

"I'm beginning to think he needs acquaintance with another kind of examiner," he grumbled, dryly.

"That's it! That's it!" Jean's glee was childlike. "Oh, uncle, you've got it! Oh, what a noble mind was here o'erthrown!" and her dancing eyes rolled heavenward. "Uncle, dear," anxiously, "where *do* you suppose his poor wits have gone a-wandering?"

The old gentleman turned about sharply as the car began to move.

"If you want my opinion, miss," he said, shortly, but with his shrewd eyes all a-twinkle, "I think we're going to find out in town to-day that his wits have

gone where his heart went long ago. Good-by, Doctor!" genially. "And now, Sam, move her up a speed!"

We stood watching them out of sight, I speculating upon the trial that my young pal's adroitness must face this day; she thinking—I knew not what; but when I looked at her I found a little pucker written in her brow.

"Dick *does* do funny—doesn't he?" Half thoughtfully, half questioningly, the girl murmured it. Then her smile flashed, radiant as the sunlight upon the polished magnolia-leaves. "But, oh, he's a dear!" happily.

I wondered how dear!

And was her joy for Dick or Danny: for a living memory or for a living man?

I determined I would know. I *must!*

XXVII

THE SPARK DIVINE

"LOOK here, Dominie, you're not listening—you're not hearing a word I say!"

My pal had broken off in his account of his day in town and now fixed me with a look half aggrieved yet tempered with concern.

"What's the matter, old chap? Didn't you have a nice day? You did? Well, you don't look it—sitting there staring at the lamp like a dead fish!"

I summoned a smile. "I'm all right," I murmured, shifting; "just tired—that's all. We walked a good deal to-day."

I was wondering how I should say to him what I had to say.

Danny grinned. "Getting out of practice, eh? Not as limber as you were on the road when we—Eh? What's that?"

"Nothing!"

But the murmur that had escaped me was a wish that we were back on the road together.

My pal pushed a hassock to my feet.

"I know you're tired!" sympathetically. "Girls don't think! Jean's a regular young Diana, and

I'll bet she sprinted you all the way to Holly Court!"

I said nothing. But in my mind I saw a girl walking beside me in the glory of the morning. I felt the pressure of her firm grip upon my arm, guiding me, leading me tenderly, as she picked my steps for me down the crooked, rocky way that he and I had climbed together in the dusk of a dying day.

"Poor old Dominie!" Danny considered me thoughtfully. "Say, you *did* play to tough luck to-day, didn't you! First of all, the strain with that fool doctor this morning, and then—" My young pal's tone was sympathetic as he clipped a cigar. "Yes, sir, I can just see you must have had your work cut out, keeping up that damned clerical front all day for those two women!" He struck a match savagely.

And as he puffed, I was thinking of her there in the crisping leaves at my feet as I sat again on the big stone at the turn of the old turnpike.

"I don't think it's because you're a clergyman that I like you so," she was saying, ingenuously. "I think it's just because you're *you*—because you're gentle and good and kind. You're like my father must have been, I know." And she had sat back, looking at me proudly, her eyes shining. "And we're going to be *such* friends! And you're going to stay on here for ever and for ever and look after Dick and me; and I'm going to try to make up to you just—oh, a wee *little* bit—what Marjorie would have been!"

And I had choked and could not answer her.

Danny's chuckle brought me back.

"Say, the little lady had me going some this morning—eh? I mean about that old gate!" and he puffed, grinning. "She had me hopping there for a minute like a toad on a hot shovel!" and he laughed. "The Victor's Gate!—what jolly rot!" and my young pal's mouth drew downward with contempt. "Just like this country down here, still sticking to its silly Feudal Age sentimentality! Victor's Gate!—pooh! poppycock!" and he leered up at the portrait of the soldier grandfather. "Say, you watch me how quick I'll put that old gate in the junk-pile! Why, right now there's an improvement syndicate wants to open up a new addition all along that old turnpike. Fellow tackled me about it to-day—made me some figures," and he fished a paper from his pocket. "Talk about money!" He made an eloquent gesture. "Dominie"—excitedly—"the melon we stumbled on gets bigger every day!" He lay back, rolling his cigar between his lips, his eyes devouring the paper greedily.

Again in my memory the whisper of crisping leaves as she stirred and the murmur of her voice in sudden, sweet concern as she looked back up the hill.

"I know you don't think for a minute that Dick meant what he said about the Victor's Gate." Yet I thought she was vaguely troubled about it herself. "You know how he treasures every legend about his grandparents, and, like his father did, keeps everything just as they left it. You notice that?" Then,

as I nodded: "And he is just crazy about the old gate. I *know* you must know it from hearing him talk. But still I—"

She had hesitated wistfully, and I had tried to summon warm assurance of how often I had heard Dick speak of it—but, oh, I could not! Before the trustful fixity of the girl's clear eyes—so like my Marjorie's!—the poor lie had faltered in my throat. I could not have lied to Marjorie. Was it coming to it that I could not lie to Jean?

"But about to-day"—as from far away my pal's voice asserted itself: "As I was telling you just now, always heretofore when I've gone up against towns it's been the regular graft for me to know all about everybody else and nobody know about me—remember?" He chuckled, flicking his cigar's ash. "Well, this time it was a brand-new turn, let me tell you! I mean this having everybody wise to who you were but not having a single, solitary line on anybody else yourself. Some game, I want you to know!" He nodded feelingly. "You see, they were all gentlemen—all a lot of your honest, high-minded dubs"—his lip curled—"and it never entered their heads to think I was anything but what I seemed. Well, you know how easy it is for me to put over anything on a bunch like that!"

And my young pal puffed lightly and with a little air of pride, waiting for my sympathy, my applause.

And I tried to smile, tried to brighten with some shadow of the old-time interest I had ever displayed in all the lad's exploits. But in my soul was a

nausea as I thought of the girl's confidences to me: of her glory in her lover's pride in his heritage of an unsullied name. She was such a lucky girl, she said, to know that she loved and was loved by a man who had never deliberately wronged another or done aught that was mean or low.

"Yes, sir," came Danny's comfortable, elated chuckle, "it certainly was a walk-over! And let me tell you, I got wise—just by listening to a lot of things to-day that showed me chances"—and Danny nodded mysteriously; "chances because, you see, they don't suspect me—would never think of *me* rooking them, you know!"

He leered, and for the first time I experienced a disgust for Danny only akin to that which I cherished for myself. And in my throat I felt an anger rise.

"I thought you said if you ever had another chance you were going to live square."

Danny looked at me sidewise, his eyes twinkling quizzically as though I had propounded a joke, as, indeed, he seemed to think I had.

"Say, don't get humorous! I was hungry then, and broke—all in. So were you." Very carefully he dusted a shadow of ash from the velvet cuff of his lounging-coat. "I've put it off now"—coolly—"until Jean and I are married. Oh, say," with sudden interest, "how about to-day? Did you worm it out of her?" and Danny came over, squaring himself before my chair. He fanned his hand at me. "Oh, don't do the innocent with *me*, you old fox. You

know what I mean!" and he rocked smilingly. "I guess, though, you found I'd given you the straight tip all right—eh? Aw, come off!" with boyish derision. "You know what I told you about her being in—er—I mean about her liking me for myself—*you* know!"

I stared at him as he lighted a fresh cigar with care; stared on as he threw back his good-looking head under a little nimbus of writhing smoke; stared blankly as he bent a narrowed glance at me, whimsical and sly.

And then with abruptness I laughed.

I laughed involuntarily—and on through a half-hysteric prolongation that marked the snapping of the tension of a trying day. And my young pal, placing his own construction upon my mirth, nodded with comfortable elation, whereat I laughed the more.

For if there was one thing that my talk with Jean had shown, it was that the "Dick" that her every tender reminiscence cherished was he who had been her comrade, brother, knight—and lover—through all the cumulative years since childhood's time. If there was one thing that the day had left certain it was that her ideal was all that Danny was not and would never be. If there was one thing I *knew* now and upon which I would stake my soul, it was that Danny's portion of her love was merely for the counterfeit resemblance to that dear one who had been and was no more, but who would hold this girl's heart, come weal or woe, through life—aye, through death—for evermore.

"But suppose he had never come back," I had said to her. She had made me rest upon the old stone at the turn of the road, and now sat in the crisping leaves at my feet. And though she could not know, I marked that it was where Danny had sat before her, in what now seemed ages and ages ago. "Suppose, my—my daughter"—earnestly—"that some bright morning—as sunny, as beautiful as this—there should have come to you the realization that never would you hear his voice again—what then?" Now I spoke feelingly enough, for I was thinking of my Marjorie.

She sat up, her eyes wide, but steady as the stars.

"You mean"—simply—"if Dick had died?"

"Aye"—solemnly—"that you would never see his face again!"

To my surprise her smile flashed.

"Oh, but I should!" confidently. "The dead don't die, you know; they just go right on living—waiting for us. That's what *she* believed"—looking up the hill—"and waited through nearly forty years." Her luminous eyes grew thoughtful, tender. "And I wouldn't think of believing anything else about—Dick. Of course we would have each other again—*you* know that!" trustfully.

But I faltered now where once I firmly trod, and could only answer this childlike faith with a mumble that was evasive:

"And so Dick, though dead, would still to you be living?"

She nodded brightly.

"Of course. And he would know everything I

did. Just as your Marjorie"—she grew gravely, sweetly tender—"knows everything *you* do; follows every one of your beautiful, kind thoughts—is near you all the time!"

I looked at her, then leaned forward where I sat, grounding my cane into the leaves and resting my chin upon it to hide a sudden, weak trembling of my mouth. Marjorie to know—to see me as I was! Ah no! the dead were dead! To them all interest in, all knowledge of our deeds was past; all joy and grief to them—

Who knows!

Like solemn bell intoned, that whisper far within.

And of a sudden the world grew very still to me—like a city far away.

I started at a touch.

She had slipped nearer and laid her hand upon my knee—a baby trick of Marjorie's in the days of long ago. She did not speak; she did not even smile—in her pure, sweet face was a serenity divine. But from her soul to mine, like Hertzian waves that bridge the mighty silences, there passed a wondrous sympathy that bowed my head in shame.

"Dreaming?" And now again I started, for it was Danny's touch I felt.

I shook my head, started to speak, then hesitated.

"Eh?" said my pal, grinning.

I drew a deep breath. "Danny lad," I said, beginning blindly, "we've been pals together a long, long time. Eh, lad?"

"A long, long time, old chap!" and at the affection in his voice I winced.

But I had to go on.

"And you know how I love you, lad."

"Eh? Bet your life!" heartily. He discarded his cigar, stooping to me earnestly.

"Will you"—I struggled with the dryness of my throat—"I wonder would you do something—be willing to do something I ask. Oh, I wonder!" I finished in a hopeless whisper.

Danny straightened, his light laugh buoyant.

"Speak!" he said, oracularly, "and it shall be given unto thee even unto the half of my kingdom!"

I lifted a wan smile. What though if it be unto all of his kingdom!

And then I told him my heart's desire.

In the end it was to have him slump into a chair, facing me with a stare that blended wonderment and consternation—withal, reproach.

"Say, are you in earnest?"

"Aye, Danny!"

I mumbled it apologetically, feeling my ears all atingle for the weakness I displayed.

"Well, of all the come-offs!" he gasped. "*You!*" —and he threw back his head and laughed—"you, whose frame-up the whole scheme is! Well, if that don't— Look here"—incredulously—"do you mean to say you are willing for us to cut stick and give up everything—all *this?*" His gesture embraced all of the comfort about us—all that lay beyond. "Just meekly walk off and go our ways again, eh? . . . Well, for crimini's sake!"

I cowered under his sardonic glance.

"It's because of the girl, Danny," I attempted lamely; "the—the pity of it."

"Um! Yes, I know, but—" He twisted with a short, a hollow laugh; "that's what makes it funny. I mean that's what I can't get over—the idea of *you* turning soft this way!" And by his look at me I felt I had sunk immeasurably in his esteem. "You, who've always said you just wanted to get your claws on the world's throat once, so you could repay some of the suffering it had given you and yours!"

I smiled sadly. "I had been bitter," I said, "and life was hard."

"Hard! And would it be any easier now?"

And I could not answer him.

Danny rumbled vexedly. "Look here, didn't you say yourself that it was better for her to have a lifetime wrong than a lifetime sorrow?"

Aye, I had said so.

"Well, isn't it?" And his looks were black.

I was silent.

"Look here, Dominie, don't you believe—don't you *know* I'll make her happy?" The boy's tone softened wistfully.

"Yes, lad," I answered, frankly; "it isn't that—"

I halted, tongue-locked and dismayed in the presence of a sudden realization of my own impotency to plead.

"Then shut up!" My young pal's tone became gruffly affectionate, relieved. "Come on to bed, and make up your mind to one thing. We're *not* going to do any such fool thing as you propose."

"But, Danny—"

"Forget it!" and he dragged me to my feet. "To-morrow you'll be ashamed of yourself. Only"—his eyes bored me as he laid his hands upon my shoulders—"don't let's ever have this up again, or—or we might quarrel, old chap!" This last slowly, somberly. "That wouldn't do, would it?"

"Danny!" I caught his hand, frightened.

A slow smile touched his mouth.

"I half believe now that you've been stringing me," he said, his tone suspicious. "The idea of *you* flaring up this way—you who have always boasted that your soul was as cold and lifeless as—as those ashes there!"

I turned, following his eye.

Aye, cold and gray and dead they were—all fireless. And yet not quite, for I saw one tiny point that still glowed bravely red.

It still was there when through the darkness I looked back from the door.

XXVIII

"PALS FIRST!"

JEAN, with her joyousness, her sweetness and light, coming through the golden morning with her silvery, pealing gong—her cheery, lifted yodel that bespoke her comradery. And Dr. Chilton, with his beetling brows and false professional strut, his vague, sheepish smile suggesting oil-veneering acid, slipping shadow-like in upon us when least expected.

These two—what a contrast in those days at Winnicrest!

What effort or struggle it cost Dick's cousin to reconcile himself to new conditions I had no means of telling from any outward signs. There was nothing evident except the complaisance with which he lent himself to making the most of his half a loaf with Danny rather than no loaf at all with Jean.

Here he exacted every crumb he could.

Meantime, the two men fell into an attitude of tacit understanding that even in private there should be nothing suggesting that my pal was not the man he seemed.

"The fellow's a regular cormorant, though," grumbled my pal; "I can't imagine what he does with money."

Then one day he came to me in wrath.

"He's not a cormorant," said Danny, savagely; "he's a buzzard! He's not like you—he's perfectly willing to have Jean sacrificed so long as he can pick her bones."

And he told me how Dick's cousin had come to him with protests over Jean's entanglement; how he had pleaded that she be left out.

"Honestly," said my young pal, "he talked so straight that I began to think maybe I had wised the grubber up wrong and that he had a white streak somewhere along with all that yellow. But gee!"—disgustedly.

I was all afire with interest.

"Danny, tell me—what did you say?"

"Why, I just called his bluff—for it *was* a bluff, though I won't say he wasn't bluffing himself more than me. I just knocked him over by saying I was perfectly willing to leave Jean out—even willing to tell the Judge I wasn't Castleman—"

"Danny!"—eagerly.

"Wait, you goop! I say I *told* him that"—grinning. "I just wanted to try him out. I made one condition."

This, as he explained, was that Jean and the Judge should be invested with "the will," thus securing the property's succession as the dead man had designed.

"And he couldn't rise to it," said Danny, gloomily.

I did not wonder, knowing Chilton, and that he well understood he could never have part in Jean or what was hers.

Better, with him, a chance with the impostor.

"And of course—why not!" I muttered, moodily, from the chair where I was sunk "We all have our price!"

My pal's puzzled frown bored at me.

"Our price?" he repeated.

"Aye, for betrayal—from Judas down!"

He stared a moment. "Now! now!"—vexedly—"what's the use of talking that way, Dominie! You—you didn't 'sell' Jean."

I looked up quickly, then down again.

What was there to say!

He growled protestingly. "Now look here, old man"—and he stooped, trying to get my eye—"what's eating you? You know you didn't sell Jean! There's no money between you and me. Why, we're pals, and share and share alike. And that reminds me," he added, quickly, "you never ask me for a dollar."

I smiled bitterly.

"My price," I said, "was not money."

He straightened impatiently. "All right"—sullenly. "What was it, then?"

"Your love," I said, simply.

"Dominie"—and he caught his breath. Then he laughed. "You old rascal! you make me tired!"

He seemed to think it all a joke of mine.

Yet it was a talk I brooded over.

How was I better, after all, than this hypocritical, mercenary cousin of Castleman's whom I so much despised?

I *was* no better. We each were traffickers; he for

money, I for love—the love of Danny, who was all the world to me.

Even love could be a monstrous thing when it was the price of betrayal of the innocent.

Aye, did I not know?

Again I felt the old granite hardness about my mouth as I thought of *him*—of him to whom I had given my bairn, knowing naught of the infirmity that made him a madman when in his cups.

They had all been silent there!

If any man can show just cause why they may not lawfully be joined together, let him now speak, or else hereafter for ever hold his peace.

How often, in my ministration in days agone, had I paused there, measuring a silence—waiting.

Waiting through silence always.

And now soon these solemn words would be pronounced again—this time above my lad and Jean. And there, I knew, would sit Dick's cousin, hearing all, but silent—unprotesting.

Oh, monstrous perfidy!

Aye, but what of him whose rôle it was to be to stand there before all, in a mummery of priestly office and mock the altar of the living God!

Now as I thought of it all moodily I began, oddly enough, to think of priestly vows—of times and scenes, long, long forgotten, as I thought.

Across the span of forty years there flashed, gem-like, the memory of my ordination. Oddly, I could see again the face of the good old bishop, hear again his voice as he took my hands when all was over. "Let nothing ever dismay you, John."

Dismay! Of a sudden I remembered something that did dismay.

I fled to Danny in affright.

I found him in his room, and poured protests, pleadings—all incoherently, I knew. . . . "So I can't, lad," I finished, pantingly; "it will not do — you *must* get some one else. . . . Oh, Danny lad, just do this thing for me!"

"Why, you're crazy!" and he scoffed at me in his kindly way—merely amused, it seemed. "Why, Dominie, Jean wouldn't be married by any one but you— Besides"—he shrugged abruptly—"it's too late now, anyhow—all the arrangements have been made." And he turned to go, his mind, I could see, upon the papers in his hand.

"But, Danny"—and I caught his arm.

"Well?"

Now I was trembling before the frightful doubt that had seized my soul. I whispered it to him, fearful of who might hear.

His brow clouded. "Are you sure?"

I nodded. "I was deposed"—hoarsely—"after my conviction. I'm an unfrocked priest"—bitterly.

My pal stood thinking.

"Um! that does make it bad," he mumbled, half aloud.

"You see"—I caught him eagerly—"just *that* fact would let me out on this." He must see—I knew he did see, and I felt relief.

Relief short-lived.

His head went back with a little toss of decision.

"We can't help it now"—somberly; and his ges-

ture put the thing away. "You'll *have* to go on. After all, Dominie," in tone of reckless impatience, "what difference does it make? No one will ever know!"

"Danny!" and I held him. "You don't mean that! Think!"

"Well—what?" He frowned, dragging his lip between his teeth.

"Think!"—desperately.

He looked down a moment, and I thought shamefacedly. Then his old daredevil smile awoke. His hand patted my shoulder carelessly.

"*You're* thinking too much, old pal; and that's what's the matter with you."

He was right; it was what was the matter with me—thinking too much!

There seemed so much to think of now.

Just now I was thinking of her piquant, bright face when she had asked of me that morning a "great favor": might she call me "father" as my Marjorie had called me in another land and time?

And now, oddly, as I stood there weakly, trying to summon artifice or argument with which to plead with Danny, the face pictured in my distraught mind seemed to blend with that other face—that which I had loved long since and lost awhile. So that the two seemed but as one.

"You're still thinking," my young pal scolded; whereupon he shook me playfully. "Are you going to quit it?"

"Yes, Danny"—obediently.

"I don't believe you!"—lightly. And as he went

down-stairs I heard him humming a couplet of his own.

> "Don't kick on the hand that to-day you drew;
> To-morrow we'll shuffle the cards anew."

But in the evening when we met again he challenged me.

"What are you thinking of now, you old schemer?" And he hugged his arm about my shoulder in the way I loved.

"Nothing, lad."

Nothing, indeed! Only of her helplessness, of the tragic dependence of her fate upon a broken reed like me.

And now, thinking of it all, brooding over it all, there came a day when I went to him again.

He was in his room, reading old letters—"soaking up information," he told me.

"Don't you love Jean, Danny?"

He grinned at me, hugging his knee. "What a question, Dominie!"

"Answer it, lad."

"Stuff!" and his foot swung carelessly. "You know I do," but his glance went roving out of the window. Presently he drew toward him a plat of the Winnicrest estate, and I guessed that he was in some contemplation over his proposed suburban "addition."

"No," I said. Then, as he looked at me, "You don't love Jean."

"I don't, eh!"—absently.

I shook my head. "Danny lad, if you loved

her the least bit you would never dishonor her by a mockery of the holiest sacrament a woman knows."

He stared. Then his slow grin came.

"By ginny, old man, you're keeping up this clerical lay so long that hanged if you're not getting all the patter again. Say, any one, to hear you, would think—" He broke off, laughing, his eyes quizzical, mocking. "You bet I love her so well I'm not going to take any chances of losing her through any fool hitches with outsiders—I know *that!*" He shook his head at me. "So much at stake, Dominie!" And again his eye went astray through the window. He stood up, going.

So much at stake! But not, with him, a woman's heart and honor!

And I think it was at this instant that I came to my great decision.

"I won't do it, Danny," I said, just as he smiled back at me from the door.

"What's that!" He looked at me queerly, then closed the door closely, a frown between his brows.

"I'll not marry you and Jean."

He came slowly toward me.

"Don't be a fool, Dominie!" and there was disgust, rather than vexation, in his tone. "Now see here, you listen to me. You always have listened to me, haven't you? . . . All right."

But though I listened again now, it was but to hear with my outward ears. Indeed, I marveled that what he said seemed to me only heartless, and I was conscious of bitter shame for myself that I had

come to a pass where I should feel disparagement of aught my lad could think or say.

It scarcely seemed my voice I heard when he was through.

"Danny, I can't—I won't go on!"

"Won't!"

"I won't!" It did not seem to be me that was speaking, but some one else—some one far away. Yet I felt myself all atremble, so that I rested my arm upon the mantel, close beside the long Colonial mirror where we had found Jean's message to her dead lover on that night. "I won't go on," I heard my voice repeat.

He came close, but I did not wince. It took no courage, this, for I knew that there was no need ever to fear menace from my lad's hand. The only thing I had to fear was the blight of his anger—and the sorrow, the disappointment, I knew I fain must cause him.

"You *won't* go on with the marriage?"

I shook my head slowly. "Nor with anything, Danny—I won't, *nor must you!*"

He took my chin between his hands, gently turning my face to his.

"Dominie, what's the matter with you?"

I tried to smile, yet feeling it a woeful failure.

"I don't know, Danny lad."

"Tell me something — haven't I always done square by you?"

I felt a sudden flood well to my eyes, overflow, and trickle down my cheek to where it met his hand.

"The squarest, the kindest — the best — " I choked.

"And we're pals, aren't we?" How tender was his voice!

"Aye, pals, Danny!"

He bent closer. "Always—eh, Dominie?"

"Oh, lad, I hope so!" But my own voice was hesitant; tinged with mournful doubt—with fear.

And now, what with this and something that he saw within my eyes, his hands dropped slowly from my face. He walked from me to the window, then back again and stood before me.

And then of a sudden he straightened sharply.

"Look at me!" he said.

I shrank, knowing what was coming—terrified.

"Pals first!" he cried, his finger lifted high.

And he made me the sign.

"Danny!" I gasped.

He stepped back, all ready for the second call.

"Danny, listen!" and I tried to catch his arm.

"Pals first!" he cried again, and waited an instant, giving me a chance to yield before he made the final call.

"Wait, lad!" I whispered, pleadingly. "Wait! Give me time."

His hand hesitated in air, then was slowly lowered.

"What is it you mean to do?" he demanded, coldly. "What's in your head?"

I answered nothing, just looked at him, torn by the sorrow in his dark eyes. Of a sudden these widened.

"Dominie!"—sharply—"you're not going to throw me down—*me!*"

Was I?

Throw Danny down—*Danny?*

I looked at him dazedly, trying to get hold of it, groping like a man through a fog. The room seemed to swim to me.

"Wait," I answered him, and sank into a chair, my fingers closed tightly about his hand. "Let me think."

He stepped back from me.

"To think that *you* would round on me!" he breathed.

And, oh, the reproach he voiced in that one utterance—the pain!

"Wait!" I pleaded.

But he would not. "You'll tell *her?*—you would dare?" Then, as I was silent, "Oh, you're mad!" and the boy groaned. "Think, Dominie! think what it means! think what we lose!"

I was thinking of that; taking it all into account for him. As for myself, gone now, somehow, was all care for loss of riches and power—comfort, even. There was something so much bigger that I stood to lose if I made this revelation. There was the respect, the honor, given me by this little girl who had appropriated me as a father.

What was Danny saying?

"Think, *think*, Dominie," he was whispering, "how she will despise you; think how she'll look at you when she learns—"

"Oh, don't I know!"—miserably.

"—even the little of yourself you'll have to tell!"

"Oh, lad!" And I looked at him. How little he

understood that I must needs tell *all* if I would have her believe aught. For I knew that only a frank revelation of my own damning blot of prison infamy could make convincing my denunciation of him. And to do less than convince her was to fail in saving her.

As it was, she would believe me; that I knew. Aye, and Danny knew.

Poor girl! she would have to believe, seeing, knowing, the price she saw me pay.

"I shall tell all," I heard my voice.

"Not *all!* Oh, Dominie, you're not!" And now his voice lifted passionately, deriding my folly. "You want this girl to know that you're not a kindly, loving, gentle old man—such as she thinks you—but a creature embittered and hardened, hating society and all his kind—for that's *you*, by your own admission! . . . You mean you're going to tell Jean you're a vagabond tramp, an outcast, a—"

My pal stopped before the pleading of my hand.

He subsided scornfully. "Hurts, eh, to know what she'll think of you!" And his hollow laugh rattled. "I shouldn't wonder if she would have the servants throw you out. She ought to!"

I was silent. He could add no ignominy that my imagination had not plumbed. Her horror, her loathing, her scorn, all were part of the price.

The other part was the loss of Danny.

"I'd think well!" came my pal's voice as he paced before me; "for what do you gain, Dominie?" Then in bitter contempt, "Nothing!"

"Nothing," I agreed, forlornly.

"And she gains nothing!"

And this time I was silent.

Somewhere afar in the house I could hear Aunt Caroline's droning of a long-meter hymn, punctured at intervals by sharp admonitions to Jeff or Mandy. I remembered that visitors were expected to-night from Holly Court.

He was remembering, too, for I heard him mutter vexedly.

"Look here, old chap"—abruptly—"we'll just let this matter go now and settle it to-morrow—"

I shook my head. Of a sudden it was borne to me that it was settled.

We were at the end.

I stood up slowly, holding unsteadily to a chair, looking at my lad with all my soul, wondering if it were for the last time.

"Dominie!" he breathed, reading what he saw.

I bowed my head.

"*Look* to yourself, Danny!" I gasped in warning. And I lurched blindly toward my room.

At the threshold his voice checked me.

"Dominie!" He did not move to come nearer, but looked at me from where he stood, and, as it seemed to me, from across a mighty gulf. "You want to look to yourself, too; you don't know what they—"

He swallowed, then burst forth, passionately:

"Have you forgotten that they flung a priest of God into a prison hell for five years because he found a dead man in a lane with a pistol by his side—"

"Don't, Danny!"

"—a brute whom conscience had killed when he found that he had struck once too often the sweet young wife who loved him—your Marjorie?"

"*Please*, Danny!"—in agony.

And I fled.

In my room, with door closed, I let my knees sink under me as they would, letting me fall, my arms flung wide upon the bed, my heart and body spending themselves in the violence of long-imprisoned grief. Again I felt, again I lived that night of horror. Again I saw the white set faces of my terrified little band of friends and neighbors; again I heard the sullen murmurs of the men—all angry with the law that it should lay its hand on me. Again I felt the hard gripping of their honest toil-worn hands as they told me I had done well—"had played the man," none of them doubting for a moment that I had really done this thing that they applauded.

That awful hour when I saw my sheep turned wolves, and all that I had pleaded for and taught, undone—forgotten. . . .

And then they had all forsaken me and fled.

Aye, as you have forsaken Him!

I lifted my head, looking toward the door. But it was closed; no one had spoken in the room.

Yet I had heard, or thought I had.

Nothing there! nothing moving, even! Nothing except the red bar of sunset light, quivering through the top of the old magnolia outside, touching the window-panes of the room. It touched me, too, throwing my shadow in relief upon the white wall

beyond the bed, projecting, too, a little bit of the window-sash—making two dark lines that intersected there. Two dark lines against a field of red.

How like a black cross against an Eastern sky!

How like! And, oh, how far away—O God! how far! How faint and lost the last, thin remnant of that distant cry: *Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do!*

And now, as I looked, the picture brightened till it seemed afire; then receded, slowly lessening in size, like oriflamme borne by One Who led the way. . . . I watched till the last vestige faded from the wall—till even my own shadow there was gone, leaving me alone.

And still I hung there, eyes upon the wall, listening, listening to the memory of that far-off cry; trying to find its echo in my soul.

And in that hour I found myself.

So it came about a little later that, having donned my own old ragged vestments, I climbed for the last time the stone fence beside the Victor's Gate. Then, staff in hand, I went sadly down the old turnpike to break the heart of Jean.

XXIX

THE VICTOR'S GATE

LONG before I had finished she had subsided to a low sobbing, her head upon her arms there on the table in the twilit room.

My heart bled for her. I felt myself a brute, a monster—as one whose hand had stricken down a child. In her white face there had been no sign of scorn, of loathing, only what seemed wonder and a frightened grief.

And of a sudden she had dropped there, like a flower broken at the stem.

It was more than I could bear. If she had only reproached me, only said one bitter word!

If she could only forgive me before I went my way! Yet I knew I could not mock her by the asking; I must not insult her with another speech.

And yet to hear her speak just once!

And so I stood lingering, drooping, fingering my shabby old derby, knowing I must go now, yet wistful for a last word.

Yes, I must go.

I turned, my glance ranging through the long windows, down the stone terrace, past the drowsing

sentinel lions that had not served to keep out Death and Grief. Beyond these, but glamorous now, except for its diamond glitter, the ancient fountain with its mossy bowls, dripping, dripping! And far away in the purpling haze the high square brick tower in its tiny lake, but fading, fading now like the last turret of a crumbling castle of dreams. Fading, too, the domed greenhouse just this side, but gleaming still, just as it had that afternoon, scarce a month before, when I had stood here, leering after her, harkening sardonically to her joy.

And now—

Ah, now there was her weeping in my ear—and, oh, the difference to me!

She stirred, her head lifting on her hand.

"You—you are going?"

Her voice was dull—all choked with grief. Yet in it was no note unkind.

"Aye, Je— Yes, madam," I stammered; "I mean miss—yes, I'm going now." How kind, how good of her to speak to me!

"Where?" she breathed.

Where, indeed! I had not thought about it—I could not know. Into the night somewhere—and on my way—

"Where?" she asked again.

I looked at her, trying to summon some poor lie, but failed.

"God knows!" and I dropped my head, thinking of my lad I'd lost.

I saw her little handkerchief sweep her eyes—once only, for she was choking back her tears. It

came to me how brave she strove to be, and still how kind, how generous to me because of my weight of years.

"And—and have you any money?"

The old, old cry of the world! the old, old, ever-present first thought in all life's times of joy or grief!

"Aye—quite enough!" And I lifted my head, smiling, knowing I fain must trick her there, or else her pitying bounty would be pressed on me.

Again the silence seemed to dismiss me, and I turned.

But her voice came, wistful, once again.

"And you have to go on now—alone?"

Alone? Ah, no!

I shook my head, wondering if she would understand.

"I know," she whispered with a little sobbing catch of breath. "Oh, I know!"

She looked at me miserably, and then of a sudden her face dropped within her hands.

"Dick! Dick!" she moaned. "Oh, I can't bear it! I can't—I *can't* go on!"

Now as I looked upon her misery I forgot the gulf between her and my shame. I felt only yearning fatherhood; I remembered only pitying love. It even passed from me in that moment that I was an outcast priest; and drawing near, I laid my hand upon her head and blessed her, praying for her the peace of God that passeth all understanding.

And then through a mist and rain I plunged blindly to the door, only to find myself clasped in

tight embrace—locked in what seemed bands of steel.

"Dominie! Dominie!" a voice was crying in my ear. A dear, beloved voice that I had thought to never hear again—his own. . . . And now another clinging to me, and before my eyes a face like Marjorie's—the face of one who smiled and wept, and laughed again, like sunshine playing through an April rain. . . . What did it mean? What was it all?

I could not understand. But of a sudden I began to tremble.

"Danny!" I faltered.

Jean nodded, drawing him to her with her other arm.

"'Danny,'" she said, looking from me to him with eyes ashine, "and *Dick!*"

Very patient with me, those two dear children, sitting there with me between, each trying in a breath to tell me all the story of their beautiful, benevolent conspiracy!

For such it had been—a conspiracy!

A conspiracy to entangle a poor, embittered old fellow in a situation where he must needs find of his own accord that which they had faith he never had lost—the divine spark of manhood which does not ever quite die in any of us.

"Least of all in you, poor dear," sighed Jean; "you who have never been capable of a crime in all your life!"

I looked down—shrinking, remembering the brand my countrymen had placed upon my name.

"There were others who thought differently, my child"—and, oh, I could speak gently of it now and without bitterness, for God surely had been good to me. "There were only a few who—"

I broke off to look at Danny, then at that which he had unfolded for me to read. Yet when I had recognized the two great official seals I could not hold it in my quivering hand.

"Nice thing, I don't think!" Danny was saying, indignantly; "this thing of pardoning a man for what they've found out he never did!"

"Danny!"

But there was more. My cup of joy was not yet full, it seemed. It was overflow in the discovery that not only was I rehabilitated by state, but Church as well.

"Your bishop has been camping on the neck of the Home Secretary for months, setting him crazy trying to find some trace of you. The papers over there have been full of your case— Oh, there's no end of a lovely row!"—complacently. "Even a certain great Personage has taken a hand and—"

"Wait!" I cried, chokingly.

I had to have time to think—to take it in; I was all bewildered—in a dream.

Yet it was a beautiful dream, if such it was; a dream filled with a brightness that never was on land or sea; a dream that touched me with a wondrous awe.

My lips moved. A glow suffused my soul—a warmth that seemed a love for all mankind; a charity for all who faltered, erred, or fell. I knew the fatherhood of God.

He shall call upon me and I will answer him; I will be with him in trouble; I will deliver him, and honor him.

It whispered to me now—the text of the last sermon my lips had ever preached.

Looking back, I think the hardest thing of all for me to grasp was that there was no "Danny." Strive as I might, I could not get hold of it that my young pal was really Dick—Dick, who was not only not at the bottom of the sea, but had never been to sea at all.

My mind kept straying to the marvel the while I heard the story of the old friend whom Danny had met in New York, and who had been wondrously restored to health by just getting out and roughing it, living the life of the open—tramping the broad highways of his native land.

"It listened good to me," my lad explained, "so I let Europe go and tried it—only"—here he grinned at Jean—"I went him one better."

Surely, for his had been the whimsical inspiration to make it a vacation of spirit as well as of body—"to let himself go" in easy comradery with other carefree vagabonds and reveling gleefully in strange friendships made through seeming, but not actual, capitulation of principles. This it was that had made him into the "new man" that others had marked; this freshening and broadening and humanizing through the study, without prejudice, of all sorts and conditions of men.

And to think that Jean had known of this year of wandering vagabondage—had kept in touch with him all the while!

"But the post-cards from abroad?" I faltered; "the 'Castleman' whom Carleton Drummond saw lowered into the sea?"

Danny's face shadowed.

"My old professor, Dominie," he said.

And then I learned of his gift at the last moment of his round-the-world tickets, his passport and hotel coupons, to this lonely old scholar, feeble and bending and waiting the ending, but possessed of a great yearning to see just once the strange lands beyond the sea of which he had read and dreamed through long years of scholarship and poverty.

"I got the post-cards at a department store," said Danny, artlessly, "and I cooked up some 'incident' for each—that is, with the Professor's help. He knew the dope to use."

All this, that his mad enterprise might not be suspected at home or he be exposed to ridicule if it prematurely failed.

"No joking; there was one time, at the start, when I thought it was all off." Danny looked at me slyly. "It was up on the old Boston post-road," he prompted.

A memory thrilled me. "Not—you mean when I—"

He nodded. "When you found me in the snow, wandering all off the road—feverish and half nutty." He patted my hand, looking at Jean. "And he pulled me through; spent every cent he had on me. Didn't you, old chap?"—proudly—"and I let him. And he just landed!"

"It was nothing," I mumbled, still dazed.

"Oh no"—dryly—"just a little thing! Saved my life, that's all." Whereupon Jean folded my hand in both of hers.

And I had thought his whiteness prison pallor! I looked at him wonderingly, remembering he had told me so.

He shook his head ruefully. "I had to fool you, old man"—penitently; "it was the only way. You were so hard, so bitter—so turned against every—"

"I know," I whispered, my head down. How blind I had been—how far astray!

Jean pressed my hand. "You see," she said, "he was selfish; he wanted to keep his 'pal.'"

Looking back now, many things were clear. I saw how the boy had guarded my every act, protecting me from myself and from others; had beguiled my confidence through the play-acting that was his delight. And all the while he was luring my feet nearer and nearer to his home in Tennessee. The wonder of the loving plot—and Jean a party to it!"

"And nobody fooled but me!" I muttered, half sadly.

Jean looked at her lover oddly. "You are forgetting another, father," she said to me, softly, and I followed her glance at Danny. His face had fallen to a troubled gravity.

"My cousin," he said, soberly.

Indeed, I had forgotten Dr. Chilton.

And now I was to learn how my lad, easy-going and generous as he had ever been with this, his only relative, had been of another mind as to the

transgression toward Jean in the destruction of the will.

Wherefore, his resentment had taken shape in a unique scheme of punishment of his cousin—one characteristically whimsical. This was nothing less than deliberately nourishing in the doctor's mind—still struggling with its mystery—the conviction that he was, after all, only a clever adventurer, possessed of a strange likeness, withal unlikeness, to the 'dead' Castleman. Hence the artfully artless slips, lapses, and inadvertencies by which his cousin's suspicions had been forced into quick germination, affording my young pal malicious glee.

"He knows the truth now, Dominie," said Danny, with a sigh, "and he is a broken man. I am giving him still another chance, but in another field—another state. So don't worry; you'll never see him again."

I smiled a bit dubiously. "I hope he won't come to England, Danny."

"England!" And then those two dear children laughed in my face. . . . "Listen, Dominie," said my lad; "you *are* going to England, but with Jean and me"—he smiled at her—"in June—in May, if I have *my* way; but after that—"

"You're coming back to your own home at Winnicrest and live with us for ever and for ever—"

"Jean dear, I—" But her fingers lay upon my lips.

"But me no buts, sir!"—imperiously. "Why, you've already promised! . . . Why, certainly you did"—indignantly, aggrievedly—"that day you sat on the big stone below the Victor's Gate."

I laughed. How like my little Marjorie with her pretty wiles!

"Sure you did, Dominie," said Danny. "I remember her telling me."

"You see?" Jean smiled archly. "You have just forgotten."

And I began to wonder. There were so many things I had forgotten.

"So I'm glad *that's* settled," said Danny, cheerily. "Say, great Scott! Do you know we're all sitting here like owls in the dark!" He stood up.

"Dick, I told them not to light up, because—*you* know!"

I understood—as I knew that he did. It had been her fine consideration not to expose my ragamuffin dress to the curious eyes of the servants. Her aunt and the Judge, I knew, were at Miss Eugenia's.

"And we were to go by for them," Danny said to Jean. He appeared to reflect, perplexed. "Now, let's see—" In the wan light he grimaced sheepishly at me.

And I saw the dilemma, as I saw its solution. It was again their thought for me; and the only thing to do, as I announced, was for me to go back by the short-cut, even as I had come.

"Now, that's it!"—and Jean hailed the solution eagerly—"and I'll go back with you, father."

I voiced protest: "No, no, Jean; you must go with Danny."

But these two dear ones would not have it. No, she must go with me.

"Pals first!" said Jean, roguishly.

Now as we traveled joyously back along the old turnpike we came at last to the rocky hill that Danny and I had climbed at the end of that weary day. And I had to show Jean where my lad had stood, grinning back at me, crying that it was the last hill, "the very last hill I would have to climb."

"The very last, poor dear," said Jean, tremulously; "but, oh, it was a big one, wasn't it?"

I inclined my head. "And through the gloom, Jean." I turned, showing her.

"I know"—tenderly—"but then the light was coming—just as now. For look!"

And she pointed.

In the east, gold-fringed clouds curtained thinly the approach of the Queen of Night, while before her royal way was being spread a carpet worthy for her dainty feet to tread. It lay unrolled from zenith to horizon, a fabric blue-black and of velvet softness, broidered with gems of every hue—diamonds and rubies and sapphires, patterned in bijoutry beyond compare; solitaires and clusters—necklaces, tiaras, and diadems. Here and there there clung to the silky pile a smudge of formless white—a shining spatter of jewel-dust sprayed from the grinding-wheel of the Master Artificer.

And I remembered those lesser jewels of which I had heard that night and which I had thought I coveted.

A diamond fell, afar.

"It's beautiful, isn't it?" Jean said. "I mean God's world."

Now as we wound upward we drew near to the

dark barrier that I had found that night was the end of the road. Looking ahead, I thought of the grim iron gate and its vine-locked pillars that had confronted us there in such uncompromising silence.

But now, instead of silence, there was the sound of blows—the chopping of an ax, the scraping ring of a shovel. I heard voices, too—Danny's and Uncle Alex's. And again, as that night, there was the shine of a lantern.

Then all at once, at my side, Jean's yodel sounded.

It was answered by a shout from Danny:

"All right!"

A crash of something falling, and Uncle Alex's voice came.

"Dat's de last, Mister Dick!"—excitedly. "Now!"

And of a sudden the night's peace was split by a wild shriek—the scream of iron upon iron, grinding against the rust of years.

And then a cry from Jean.

"Come, father!" and she pulled upon my hand.

"What is it?" The same question I had asked there that evening that seemed so long ago.

And now, as then, I found the answer was—a gate.

But this time it was a gate that yawned, wide-armed, to welcome me within. Beyond lights twinkled brilliantly.

I gasped, dismayed.

"The Victor's Gate! Why, Danny lad, I thought it was never to be opened—"

"Till the victor comes home to Winnicrest!" They chorused it together.

And then through it they swept me—into their homes, their hearts.

And now, as I sit out here under the magnolias, nearing the last lines of my story—that long writing of the book about it all that Danny and Jean say is to make my fortune—it is hard for me to realize that it is nearly a year and a half since I came to Winnicrest.

Yet so it is, and nearly a year since that other May time when I married Jean and Danny; moreover, nearly six months since we all came home from that beautiful, wonderful visit to England.

And now over these Tennessee hills the wild mustard is spangled again—platins of gold on spreads of velvet green. Again above me the fresh young leaves of the magnolias are peeping forth timidly from their folded sheaths. The broad, dark leaves, having served their mission through the winter's gloom, are weaving their shroud upon the ground. Uncle Alex, pityingly, is gathering them into little piles with his rake, heaping them to burn. For the old man will work, despite all scoldings of Jean and Danny.

And now from the house comes the sweet music of a baby's laugh. I think of Miss Eugenia, dead a week, and who was to have been its godmother at its christening to-day.

"The old leaves are falling, Uncle Alex, giving place to new."

"Yes, sir," and he looks at me questioningly,

wistfully. "Ev'yt'ing seems a-gwine an' a-comin'; a-comin' an' a-gwine."

He draws near, bending mysteriously.

"Dey's makin' a great 'miration dere in de house erbout w'at dey gwinter have you christ'n dat baby." Saffron lights twinkle in his faded eyes. "Huh! I reckon you 'ain't got no idee w'at it is, has you?"

I confess my ignorance smilingly, but I am guessing it will be "Richard," and say so.

"No, sir"—with head cocked—"no, 'tain't! I 'uz wishin' I could tell you, but I promise' I ain't gwinter say a word. Dis got ter be a complete surprise, Miss Jean says; she ain't gwinter give you de name till de ver' las' minute."

"Oh!" An inspiration floods my darkness. "I know; it's 'Danny'!"

"Umph!"—with contempt. "Dey ain't nobody in our fam'ly wid no such name as dat!" Then he wabbles joyously. "I cayn't tell you nuthin', but Car'line say dis mornin' she boun' you gwinter drap dat chile plum smack w'en dey tell you it ter be named 'John Blair.'"

"No!"

From afar comes Aunt Caroline's summons—long-drawn, imperative, "Alex! . . . aw-w-w, Alex!"

"Comin'!" And Uncle Alex drops rake, shuffling away, muttering, "Ev'yt'ing a-comin' an' a-gwine!"

Aye, and soon I shall be "a-gwine," too! But, oh, thank God for those who are coming still and for the one will bear my name. They are calling me, the wife of my youth and my little—

"Father"—I hear a far-off voice—"we are waiting for you!" And I see a white flash through the trees—Jean's arm. "Father!"

"Coming!" I call.

And I go to give my name to Danny's boy.

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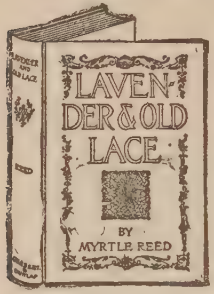

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Illustrated by Douglas Duer.

Another fascinating story of the Mexican border. Two men, lost in the desert, discover gold when, overcome by weakness, they can go no farther. The rest of the story describes the recent uprising along the border, and ends with the finding of the gold which the two prospectors had willed to the girl who is the story's heroine.

RIDERS OF THE PURPLE SAGE

Illustrated by Douglas Duer.

A picturesque romance of Utah of some forty years ago when Mormon authority ruled. In the persecution of Jane Withersteen, a rich ranch owner, we are permitted to see the methods employed by the invisible hand of the Mormon Church to break her will.

THE LAST OF THE PLAINSMEN

Illustrated with photograph reproductions.

This is the record of a trip which the author took with Buffalo Jones, known as the preserver of the American bison, across the Arizona desert and of a hunt in "that wonderful country of yellow crags, deep canons and giant pines." It is a fascinating story.

THE HERITAGE OF THE DESERT

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This big human drama is played in the Painted Desert. A lovely girl, who has been reared among Mormons, learns to love a young New Englander. The Mormon religion, however, demands that the girl shall become the second wife of one of the Mormons—

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